# LOVE IN CHIEF



ROSE K. WEEKES




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# LOVE IN CHIEF

A Novel

BY

ROSE K. WEEKES

"One should master one's passions (love, in chief),
And be loyal to one's friends."



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# LOVE IN CHIEF

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## I

### WRITE ME AS ONE WHO LOVES HIS FELLOW-MEN

THE waiting-room of Dr. Maude's surgery at Monkswell was sparely furnished with guests, mainly because the December weather was of that mild and unseasonable type commonly called unhealthy. The darkness outside was pierced by a fine, invisible rain, borne on a south wind, and the waiting-room, though heat as well as light was spread only by a single gas-burner, was not cold. One patient was with the doctor; the details of his complaint could have been overheard by the others if they had cared to listen, but they did not; sufficient unto them were their own diseases. Five centres of self-complacent misery were sitting on a cane-seated bench; the sixth person was leaning against the wall with his hands in his pockets. The only other

representative of the male sex was eight years old, and had come to have a tooth out; too stolid to feel nervous, he sat sucking peppermints. His mother, in a decent black mantilla and a square-fronted bonnet trimmed with red chrysanthemums, was talking to a girl with a baby about wrongs invisible to the unjaundiced eye. The young mother's dark eyes and delicate features had the remains of real beauty, though two years of matrimony had made her middle-aged; her pretty young sister, sitting beside her, showed what she must have been. The baby was not handsome; its pinkish-purple face was framed in a yellow woollen hood, and the colour which should have tinged its cheeks had settled upon its ugly little button of a nose and on its chin. It wheezed; the mother coughed loosely; the girl stared before her; the young man also coughed, but inobtrusively. He did not give to phthisis its due dignity.

The surgery presently discharged its patient and received the small martyr to toothache. The young man took the seat left vacant; and the gaslight, falling on his face, showed thin, brown features, eyebrows strongly arched and strongly marked, and bright, vagrant eyes which took an interest in everything. He edged a little closer to the young mother and

looked inquiring. Finding that did not answer, he plunged into conversation with a speech which was admirable in sentiment but not discreet in wording.

"Jolly baby, that."

"Yes, he was a fine boy," said the girl, her tired eyes quickening as she looked down at her child, "but he's after his teeth now, and it's pulled him daouwn awful. We didn't have a wink of sleep with him last night."

"You must be pretty tired, then," quoth the stranger. "Wonder if the little chap would come to me?"

"He don't like strangers," said the mother, doubtfully. She was unused to hear her boy called either a jolly baby or a little chap; and she distrusted the abilities of a young man, plainly unmarried, moreover, who used such terms.

"I'll hold him like a patent rocking-chair," the stranger asserted. "Come on, sonny. You won't howl at me, will you? Great land, what a weight you are! I never turned ayah before—yes, put my eye out, will you? What's wrong besides the teeth?"

"He's got a touch of bromtitus; I caught it washing-day, and he took it from me. Oh, it's crool work washing in the winter; our houses hasn't any coppers, and we has to do it all out at the back."

"Do you mean you wash the clothes in the open air?"

"Every mite of 'em. My husband he's been to the landlord times and again, but he won't do nothing for us; and they're the cheapest houses round, so we just have to put up with it."

"What a beastly shame! Who's your landlord?"

"Old Fane, up at Fanes. Ah, he is a hard man. Last time as Mr. Searle went to see him, 'You can take or leave it,' he says; 'I can get plenty more as won't complain. I will not be pestered with discontented gutter-birds,' he says. So my husband he come away; there wasn't nothing to be done."

"Fane, I think you said," said the brown-eyed stranger, upon whose face the tale had painted a gleeful anticipation, as he took down the name in a pocket-book. "I'm thinking I'd like a little friendly conversation with Mr. Fane. Whereabouts is your place?"

"Burnt House, they call it; right out in the fields it is. If he'd put in one copper for the six houses, you wouldn't think he'd ever miss the money. But he don't care about us poor folks. I wish we was in Farquhar's houses, that I do."

Conversation was here broken by Dr. Maude,

who summoned Mrs. Searle and her sister and the baby. Her short interview left her in tears. The doctor had ordered milk, which seemed to her as far beyond her means as caviare or turtle-soup. It would be got, but meanwhile Mrs. Searle would starve, Mr. Searle would swear, and the debt at the shop would grow. The stranger gave her a shilling, and fled into the surgery to escape her thanks.

The place smelt strong of drugs; shelves laden with bottles climbed up one wall, and the others were decorated with framed photographs and cases of medical books. Everything was strictly professional and methodically neat; and the doctor, slight and dark in appearance, cool and composed in manner, was the essence of his room embodied.

"What's your trouble?" he asked of the stranger, who stood before him interested and insouciant, his hands still in his pockets.

"Hæmorrhage from the lungs. Oh, I've had the charming complaint before, and I know the ways of it; I've been despaired of three times already. But I'd like you just to tinker up my old constitution, if that's possible."

"When did the hæmorrhage occur?"

"I had a smart attack Sunday, and it's been off and on ever since."

"Then you ought to be in bed."

"Quite so, Æsculapius, but I haven't one."

"There is the workhouse infirmary at Alresworth."

"To which I'm on the way; but I didn't think I could git."

Then there was silence, while Maude applied his stethoscope. After testing the lungs he tried the heart, and after the heart other organs, and soon discovered that his patient was a collection of inceptive diseases. His questions elicited a tale of ill-health lightly borne in which he did not believe, for stoicism is rare in surgery patients.

"I don't know your face—where do you come from?" Maude asked him.

"I was at Alresworth with a travelling company as a kind of a sort of a shadowy understudy of a sub-super, but I knocked up Sunday and was left behind. Nobody missed me. I can't act any more than a dead egg," said the patient, candidly — "ninety-nine, ninety-nine, ninety-nine; is that enough? But that don't matter in the profession. Hullo, were you in the cricket-team at Queens? Nice game, cricket. I always shone in it myself."

He disengaged himself, and walked across to study the photographed groups on the wall.

"Come back, please; I have not done with you," said the doctor. "What's your name?"

"Oh, *I* don't know—John Smith, I guess. Last time I played cricket was near the English cemetery at Iquique. Jolly ground it was, too. There's never a drop of rain from year's end to year's end, so the turf isn't too good; but we had thousand-foot precipices on three sides of the ground, and what could you ask more? We played till Saunders made a boundary hit, and then we hadn't a rope long enough to fetch up the ball. Next time Saunders went up there was after Yellow Jack had done with him. My hat! it was hot enough for kingdom come. The very abomination of desolation; red hills, and never a blade of grass, except the thread of green where the water comes down from the snows."

"Well, John Smith," said the doctor, "I can't do much for you; your constitution's rotten. You had better stop talking, take this medicine, and go to the infirmary, if it's true that you have no home. A motor 'bus passes here at seven, and goes to Alresworth."

The patient made a grimace. "More land of counterpane for me, I suppose. Passes here at seven, does it? I shall certainly be 'bus-sick; but, after all, tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse. Take my tip, Æsculapius, and don't you drop your cricket. Good-night."

It was only half-past six. Maude felt an

impulse to recall the picturesque stoic and bid him wait in the surgery until the omnibus passed; but honesty is a rare quality, and the stranger, by pleasing him, inspired him with mistrust. An observant man, he noticed that John Smith spoke French like a Frenchman: a Parisian could have detected the difference, for his accent was that of Guernsey: but Maude had learned modern languages at a public school. In brief, the rain was inaudible in the surgery; the stranger was a questionable character; and Maude did not ask him in.

John Smith went out whistling; his frame was lean and gaunt and loose-jointed, but he walked with a fine swing. The surgery was the last house of the village. Some hundred yards further on the railway embankment spanned the road, and a lane turning up just beyond it led to the station. John Smith, sauntering along in the increasing rain, found shelter beneath the arch and stayed there. The wind blew up from the south straight through the tunnel, and the scene circumscribed by the arc of masonry was wild and beautiful. Across the black sky raced a froth of fleecy clouds, through which a half-moon shone, girt by a pallid zone of blue and bronze. The wild streamers were so unearthly pale, the heaven so solemnly dark, that only by the moon's pres-

ence could sky be told from cloud. Gray hills, crowned with dark soft masses of woodland, folded down to a valley deep in mist, where a cluster of golden lights burned like a constellation magnified by rain; while up to his very feet the streaming road was turned to a sheet of glory by a common street-lamp.

John Smith immediately brought out a penny pencil and a penny exercise-book and began to write. Valiantly disregarding the inequalities of the brick-work, he rested the paper against the wall. He had thought of some elegant words and phrases for describing the evening sky, and wanted to fix them fast on paper before they escaped from his volatile memory. Actor he had been by chance, artist he was by nature; an artist in words, he professed himself gravely; a lover of apt phrase and finely balanced sentence; one of that happy confraternity whose goal in a strange room is always the bookcase. He had as many interests as ideas, but this reigned paramount.

The wind blew, and the rain came with it. It may have been the cold, or it may have been the weight of Mrs. Searle's baby, or it may have been the inevitable sequence of his disease, which suddenly arrested the writer's hand, and made him, choking, press a handkerchief to his lips to quell the flow. He knew how to meet

the attack, and, lacking any other couch, lay down in the road; he could not well be wetter, and a mud-bath, at least, is warm. His handkerchief was drenched, but the stream did not stop. Presently the moon dimmed before his eyes, and his own troubled breathing seemed a far-off sound. It crossed his blurred mind that he was about to solve the great riddle, and go out with the wind; and he reflected with satisfaction that Dr. Maude, who had unmercifully turned him out into the rain, would be visited by pangs of conscience. He felt neither fear nor elation, but a certain regret in leaving a world which he had persistently enjoyed in spite of all; after which consciousness went out like a spark, and John Smith lay still in the road.

## II

### HE THAT SHOWED MERCY ON HIM

TEN minutes later a train passed southwards across the arch. It had discharged passengers at the station, and among them one who soon came driving down the lane in a high dog-cart fitted with pneumatic tyres, acetylene lamps, and a correct groom sitting up behind. As it turned the corner the horse, a handsome chestnut signally well groomed, shied violently at John Smith's prostrate figure, and was promptly checked by the driver, who had him well in hand. He looked back over his shoulder. "What's that, Simpson?"

"Drunken man, sir," said the correct groom, stolidly.

"Pleasant weather to lie in the road. Still, will you?" He gripped the reins as though to curb the restive horse gave him pleasure. "Just go and see if he's all right, Simpson. He'll get run over lying under the arch there."

Simpson got down. He resented his master's charitable fads when they affected his comfort,

but he dared not complain. It was true that Mr. Farquhar carried generosity to his servants to its extreme limit, but those who transgressed his laws had to go. He bent over John Smith and announced with undeviating stolidity: "Been fighting, sir."

"Fighting, has he? Come and hold the horse for a minute."

Servant and master changed places, and Farquhar in his turn scrutinised the features of John Smith. He moved the stained handkerchief, sniffed at his lips, laid a finger on the spot where the pulse should have beaten, and then stood up.

"Shift the seat as far forward as it 'll go. Yes; now put the cushions in the bottom of the cart. The rug over them. Is the back let down? That's right." He picked up John Smith and shouldered him as if he were a gun. The luckless artist in words weighed less than eight stone, but the strength required to lift him so easily was very great, and was shown more remarkably still when Farquhar raised him up at arm's-length to put him into the dog-cart. Simpson lent his assistance, protesting only by silence against the introduction of a drunken and excessively muddy prodigal between the folds of the new carriage-rug. His discretion was rewarded by his master, who

explained, as he took his seat again and picked up the reins: "It's a case of illness, poor chap. The man's not drunk."

"Very good, sir," said Simpson, touching his cap; but he did not believe it. Even the irreproachable Mr. Farquhar was no hero to his groom.

About a mile beyond the arch Simpson had to get down to open a gate, and the dog-cart drew up at the front door of The Lilacs, which was the pleasing name of Farquhar's bachelor residence. It was a large modern villa built of red brick and white stucco, boasting Elizabethan mullioned windows on the first floor, modern bays below, a castellated turret, and a Byzantine porch with a cupola, which tasteful decorations the officious ivy had done its best to veil. Inside, the house was furnished well and, before all things, comfortably; it was heated by an arrangement of hot-air pipes in the Russian fashion, and cooled in summer by genuine punkahs. John Smith was carried in and laid before the library fire; Simpson was sent to fetch the doctor, and the master of the house himself attended on the muddy stranger. Farquhar was a wonderfully good Good Samaritan.

He began by stripping off John Smith's wet clothes, noting that the shirt, which had seen

its best and almost its worst days, was neatly marked in a woman's writing with the name of Lucian de Saumarez. His other garments, which were in better condition, bore only the red cotton hieroglyphics of the laundress. Few people could have excelled Lucian de Saumarez in the art of dressing badly; his hat alone would have roused envy in a scarecrow. Farquhar did not dare to give him brandy, but he began to practise a remedy potent as alcohol and safer. Kneeling beside the parchment-covered articulated skeleton on the sofa, he ran his fingers over him with subtle, measured movements, unpleasantly suggestive of the coiling and uncoiling of a snake. He had learned the art of massage among strange people in a strange land; it seemed literally to recall the spirit to the body it had quitted.

Lucian de Saumarez became conscious of existence in a tingling thrill of warmth which crept all over his frame. The return to life was exquisitely delicious; a deep peace rapt him far out of reach of pain, and his mental faculties came back one by one while yet his bodily sense was drowned in dreams. But, suddenly, he was aware of a change, the truth being that Farquhar had paused in his task. Vague discomfort followed; then he opened his eyes and saw, as a vignette beyond a tunnel of darkness, the

face of a man reading a letter. That letter, written by a woman's hand on thick blue paper with a gilded monogram, was familiar to Lucian; it was the same which he for nine years had carried close to his heart. Without wonder he saw the dream-stranger turn the page and read to the end, he watched him fold it up and put it back in its place; and then the trance reabsorbed him, and again he revelled in delicious dreams under the magic touch of Noel Farquhar. Some minutes later he came to himself completely, and discovered what was being done to his unconscious frame. Lucian looked on massage as first cousin to hypnotism, and hated both, with all the lively independence of a character which could not bear to place itself, even voluntarily, even for a moment, at the mercy of another man's will. Prepared with a strong protest, he opened his eyes and was struck dumb. In the open English face of Noel Farquhar he recognized the dream-vision who had read his letter.

"Ah, you've come to yourself," said Farquhar, pleasantly. "You're with friends; don't speak. The doctor will be here directly."

Lucian put up his eyebrows, sent his eyes straying round the room, and brought them back to his host's face with an air of inquiry. Farquhar smiled.

"How you came here? My horse shied at you and I picked you up. My name's Farquhar—Noel Farquhar."

"M. P.?" said Lucian, who was by fits an ardent politician.

"Quite right. Can I communicate with your friends?"

"Don't own any."

"I hope you won't say that long. Now you really must not talk any more; I sha'n't answer you if you do."

As he evidently meant to keep his word, Lucian subsided, and gave himself up to observing. The room was conventionally furnished, but he saw on the floor the skin of a black panther, and behind the door the nine-foot spiral ivory horn of a narwhal, trophies which even Whiteley cannot provide. Himself a wanderer, he rejoiced to see such tokens of his host's pursuits; a sportsman is kin to a sportsman all the world over. From studying the furniture he turned to study Noel Farquhar.

Most people knew the name of the member for Mid-Kent, and his face was tolerably familiar through the slanderous presentations which the papers call portraits. He had been in Parliament for several years, and was supposed to be a coming man. When he got on his legs, members deferred their engagements; his

speeches were generally lively, always pithy, and never long, a trinity of virtues rare as the Christian graces, and, like them, culminating in the last. He had the advantage of a good voice and delivery. As a politician he was incorruptible; he would criticise his own party, when it seemed in danger of deviating from that ideal of rectitude which animates the bosom of every British statesman. A Bayard without fear or reproach, a high-souled patriot with a caustic tongue, he had a niche all to himself among parliamentary celebrities.

He stood in his socks only five feet nine, but the width of his shoulders was exceptional, and his frame was lean and hard and supple as a panther's. Every muscle had been trained and trained again to the pitch of excellency, and every movement had the sure grace of controlled strength. The comeliness of perfect health and physical fitness was his; he diffused a kind of tonic energy which acted on susceptible people almost like an electric current. For the rest, he was the typical Englishman: fair-haired, grey-eyed, sunburnt, pleasant, in spite of the grim curve of cheek and jaw, which matched the almost ominous strength of his physique. Lucian, like other people, would have accepted him for what he seemed, if he had not seen him deliberately reading through his love-letter. As

it was, he looked into the fair, open face and knew him for a humbug; though he could not imagine why he should have read it, nor how it could advantage him to befriend a miserable, sordid, reprobate, and degraded outcast such as Lucian de Saumarez.

Dr. Maude came hard on the heels of the returning Simpson; he did not resort to Bob Sawyer's tactics to increase the reputation of his practice. Farquhar met him in the hall and brought him in, and the patient overheard an edifying fragment of conversation.

"Well, I couldn't very well leave him out in the road, poor chap, so I had to bring him along."

"And he will probably recoup himself from your plate-chest."

"What a cynic you are! I never thought of such a thing," said Farquhar, laughing.

"Your innocence must stand in your way sometimes, I should think."

"I never knew it do so. I believe, myself, that trust begets trustworthiness."

"Ah, you're a philanthropist," said Maude, walking into the room. The patient lay quiet, apparently unconscious. "I expected that it was this fellow you'd got hold of," Maude said, without surprise. "He came to me an hour

ago. I told him to go to Alresworth infirmary; I suppose he had an attack while waiting for the 'bus."

"Well, I think you might have let him wait in the surgery."

"He's probably a thief. I don't profess to be a philanthropist, myself."

"Philanthropist, indeed!" said Farquhar. "It's not philanthropy I'm feeling for you, doctor."

"I dare say," Maude responded, proceeding with his analysis of Lucian's bones.

"You persist in crediting me with virtues I don't possess."

"Modesty's your great fault; every one knows that."

"Well, yours isn't over-amiability, anyhow," returned Farquhar, again laughing.

Satirical compliments are more difficult to meet than most forms of attack, but Farquhar's unconsciousness was a perfect piece of acting. Lucian wondered whether Maude knew the motive of his philanthropy. As a fact, Maude knew nothing and suspected merely because Farquhar was a virtuous person; he would have believed that the Apostle Peter got himself martyred for a consideration, and canonised by a piece of celestial jobbery. Being put to rebuke, he confined his conversation to the

subject of Lucian's illness, and in a short time the prodigal was installed in the best room and fed with the fatted calf under the form of tinned essence of beef.

## III

### THE PROPER STUDY OF MANKIND IS MAN

FOR several days Lucian was kept dumb by the tactics of his host, who walked punctually out of the room as soon as the invalid opened his lips. In half an hour he would return to the chafing guest; and then, if Lucian remained silent, he heard the paper read aloud, but if he dared to speak he was once more left to himself. As Lucian was eminently gregarious and hated his own society, the discipline achieved its object. He was treated like a royal guest, and repaid his host by vivisecting his character. The ground of his suspicions seemed trivial, but was substantial. Feeling the letter in its old place, Lucian sometimes wondered if he had dreamed that scene. But, no, he knew it was real; for the reason that he had seen on Farquhar's face as he read an expression which he could never have imagined. What he suspected was not very clear; but Lucian had an inquisitive disposition, and his

interests at this time were limited in number. Hence his exaggerated curiosity.

The church at Monkswell was heated by pipes which on mild days brought the temperature up to seventy degrees Fahrenheit, and in cold weather left the air in such a condition that to uncover his bald head was a severe trial of the parson's faith. The weather had changed, and Farquhar, coming in after service on Sunday afternoon, went straight to the fire to warm his hands. He was an exemplary church-goer.

"Cold?" inquired Lucian, who was now allowed to talk a little.

"Bitterly. The snow-wind's blowing; we shall be white to-morrow, if I don't err."

"Gale at seventy miles an hour, temperature twenty degrees below zero; yes, I've tried that out in Athabasca, and it didn't suit me," said Lucian, whose rebellious body appreciated luxury though his hardy spirit despised it.

"My faith, no! but I'm not sure that twenty degrees below isn't better than a hundred and twenty above."

"That's a nice preparation for the bad time coming," said the incorrigible Lucian. "Talking of which, what was that devilry you used when you carried in my fainting form?"

"Devilry, indeed! It was massage."

"Not the ordinary common or garden English massage, sonny; I've tried that."

"Massage is massage all the world over, I should have said. However, I learned mine in Africa."

"And who was your moonshee?"

"An old Arab sheikh who wore immaculate robes, and carried a dagger with a handle of silver filigree and a very sharp point, with which he prodded his slaves when they failed in their duties. Are you satisfied now?"

"No, not in the least; but I didn't expect to be. Who's old Fane?"

"My dear fellow," said Farquhar, mildly, "your mind reminds me of a flea. Mr. Fane is a farmer hereabouts, a kind of local squire."

"Is he well off?"

"Tolerably, I believe. Why do you ask?"

"Old curmudgeon!" said Lucian. "Stingy old miserly murderer!"

"One at a time, I beg," said Farquhar.

"Well, he may be an angel incognito, but his war-paint's unco guid, that's all."

"How has he roused your righteous wrath?"

Lucian related Mrs. Searle's story, waxing eloquent over her wrongs, and illustrating his points with rapid foreign gestures, as his man ner was. Farquhar compressed his lips, which already joined in a sufficiently firm line. "I

know those houses," he said; "they are unfit for habitation. I tried to get them condemned a year ago. Want a copper, do they? They'll never get it from Fane."

"I wish he'd tried what starvation's like, that's all."

"Have you?"

"Have I? I was a thousandaire till I was four-and-twenty," said Lucian, clasping his lean, brown hands behind his head—"but since then, devil a penny have I had to spend! My head is bloody but unbowed beneath the bludgeonings of Fate—W. E. Henley. I'm proud to say I could take the shine out of Orestes."

Farquhar sat down by the fire and pulled the tea-table towards him. He was very useful at an afternoon party: could always remember the precise formula for every person's several cup. "How did you lose your money?" he inquired, flavoring his own tea with lemon, in the Russian style.

"Sixteen thousand in one night playing écarté, sonny. No, don't preach; I never gamble now I've got no money. Besides, on that memorable occasion my circumstances were exceptional."

"Exceptionally bad, I should think. What did you do?"

"What did I do? Commenced author, and

I flatter myself I should have made a decided hit, only I was overtaken by what another distinguished author calls Bluidy Jack. The medico swore it was the writing brought it on. I also swore, in many tongues, and had a second go; I held on gallantly for three months, and then went to a hospital, and a nurse fell in love with me. 'Those lips so sweet, so honey-sweet—' We swore fidelity. I shared with her my fortune—we broke a sixpence. She had three hundred a year and a large soul. Inconstant creature! On getting my ticket-of-leave from the hospital I introduced her to my chief pal; and would you believe it? the base villain borrowed my first fiver to elope with her with."

"Good Heavens, de Saumarez!" said Farquhar, laughing against his will, "you don't mean to tell me that all this is true?"

"True? *True?* Every blessed word of it. I then tried to 'list, but couldn't pass the medical. So I got another pal and started as a tomato-johnny in Guernsey. We're Guernsey people, you know," he added, his voice taking a different intonation. "I've a certain affection for it, too; there I'll hope to lay these carious old bones of mine when I've done with them. Mighty poor crops they'll make, too. Well, I thought Guernsey, being my own, my native

land, might be a sort of all-inclusive mascot for me. But, Lord bless you, sonny, it rained thunderbolts! Give you my word, no sooner were our glass-houses up than there arrived a record shower of aerolites; sticky, shiny, black things they were, for all the world like liquorice. Two-thirds of the panes went. As I didn't want to wreck the bosom friend's boat, we dissolved partnership, and Jonah went off on his own."

Farquhar could himself corroborate this story; he remembered the meteoric shower, which had attracted some attention.

"The stars in their courses came out of them to fight against me, you see. Well, I went back to town and held horses. I fared sumptuously every day at coffee-stalls, or at Lockhart's when I was in funds. I draw a veil over this period. I was submerged. Then, in hospital, I met a very decent fellow who got me a berth in Miss Inez Montroni's travelling company, where I lived gaily on a pound a week till that memorable Sawbath which I broke by knocking up. I was discovered by a kind angel: adsum. Are you insured against fire?"

"Oh, I'm not afraid of ill-luck!" said Farquhar.

"Aren't you, now? I detect a kind of arrogance, a sort of healthy scepticism in your tone,

my friend. I wonder what you are afraid of? Not much, I guess."

"Was your ill-health hereditary?" asked Farquhar, who as a temperance advocate studied the question of transmission.

"Don't know. My parents died ere I was born, and never saw their son, you see. I inherited my bad luck, anyway.

'Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
The sorrows of thy line!'"

"It hasn't depressed your spirits."

"Oh, I don't believe in letting trouble beat you."

"You talk as though trouble were a living personality."

"So it is; a force inimical, to be conquered, held down, and trampled into the earth."

"I don't see how you're going to conquer trouble. It has its way, and that's all."

"It's not all. Trouble will make a man despair, or drink, or gamble, or go mad, or maybe even shoot himself. Well, I'd defy it to make me deflect a hair's-breadth from myself, come all the shafts of fate. As long as I've lips I'll grin."

"That's how you take things?" said Farquhar. "Well, it's not my way." His face

lighted up with a heady defiance, his lips shut in a straight line, his eyes sparkled with quite unregenerate fire.

"What is your way, then?"

Farquhar's expression went instantly out, and he lowered his eyelids. "Well, you know, things are different for you and me," he said, diffidently. "I'm lucky in having a religious faith to fall back on."

"Oh, I *do* like you!" said Lucian, after a few seconds, smitten with an admiration which was not wholly admirable. He solemnly stretched out his hand. "Sonny, you're a great man," he declared. "I wish I had your cheek. Shake!"

Farquhar smiled politely, deprecated the compliment, and evaded the point at issue; and shortly afterwards conveyed himself out of the room on the plea that the invalid had done enough talking. It was fortunate for him that the language of the eye cannot be put in as evidence, for Lucian knew that he had detected, in Farquhar's too candid orbs, a tacit acknowledgment of all the deceit wherewith he was desirous of charging him.

Next morning in country and city men awoke to a white, silent world under a dome of blue, immaculate sky. There was no wind; and the breath of horse and rider hung still in the air

after Noel Farquhar as he rode up to Burnt House. A huge sweep of bare, white country lay outspread, sparkling in the sun; the hedges were so thickly thatched with snow that they did not break the even whiteness of the prospect. The miserable little group of black, wooden cottages, Farquhar's goal, was discernible a great way off; they were so lonely that when Farquhar rode back an hour later only his own tracks, black where the crushed snow had melted, confronted him upon the road.

The day passed, and several beside, and a week later the soiled rags of the snow still lingered under hedges and by tussocks in the fields when Farquhar took another morning ride, this time in the direction of Fanes. The house lay low; its E-shaped façade, built of bright-red brick and ornamented with facings of free-stone, and with diagonal bands of dark brown crossing one another, looked across shaven lawns and wide gravel paths to a stream formally laid out with cascades and little islands, in summer bright with roses. Some noble trees sprang from the lawn; in particular, a most beautiful silver birch, whose slight, tapering branches sustained a colony of ragged black blots, which were the nests of the rooks of Fanes. The birds took toll from all the orchards around, and were almost as well hated as their owners.

Mr. Fane had a thin, tall figure, with stooping shoulders and forward-thrusting head. A pair of keen, cold eyes looked suspiciously forth from under penthouse brows; self-sufficiency had compressed his lips, selfish study had hollowed his cheeks, and his thin, even voice, precise in enunciation even to pedantry, was the true index of a steadfastly unamiable character. The Fanes enjoyed great unpopularity; father, son, and daughter, they were all shunned like lepers. Old Fane had married abroad; no one heard his wife's maiden name, and when he came back as a widower nobody cared to ask. The two children grew up as they would. The son, Bernard, was notoriously a poacher; the daughter was a beauty, a wild rider, untutored and untamed, and shared, so it was said, her brother's heinous crimes in the preserves. It was this business which shut off the young Fanes from the society of their peers. Once in past years they had made their appearance at the first meet of the season, but they never went again; and thenceforward avoided society more scrupulously than society avoided them.

All this happened before Noel Farquhar came to The Lilacs. He had more than once tried to make friends with young Fane, and had been snubbed for his pains; and thus to this hour matters stood. Nobody knew much about

them, but they possessed a fearsome reputation, which caused nervous ladies to skip nimbly over fences when they saw Bernard Fane approaching on his big black horse.

Eumenes Fane received in his library, a long, low room walled with books. One case held tier on tier of novels in their native French, both old and new; another was devoted to theology, and put a row of Blair's most unchristian sermons across the middle shelf as a gilded breastplate against the assaults of modern heresies. Mr. Fane was a ferocious Calvinist; he felt it his duty to go in for hell, and wished to exact consent in the same beliefs from his children, his servants, and in ever-widening circles from the ends of the earth. Over the mantel hung an interesting old design in black and white, which represented the Last Day: a small queue of saints in stained-glass attitudes ascending the celestial mountains under the convoy of woolly angels, a large corps of sinners being haled out of their tombs by demons armed with three-pronged spears, which they used as toasting-forks. His Satanic Majesty was gleefully directing their operations, amid tongues of realistic flame. On the card-board mount of the picture the following verse was inscribed in youthful round-hand:

*Perdition is needful; beyond any doubt*
*Hell fire is a thing that we can't do without.*
*Saltpetre and pitchforks with brimstone and coals*
*Are arguments new to rescue men's souls.*
*We must keep it up, if we like it or not,*
*And make it eternal, and make it red-hot.*
*Mirabelle Fane.*

The signature seemed to indicate that Mr. Fane was not always implicitly obeyed by his children.

He remained sitting when Farquhar was announced, and looked as forbidding as possible. Farquhar bowed, and looked as pleasant as possible. The interview promised to be unconventional.

"You are Noel Farquhar?"

"That's my name, sir," said Farquhar, always particularly respectful to an elderly man.

"You write to me that you have made some alterations in my cottages at Burnt House," continued old Fane, referring to a letter in his hand.

"I have, sir; and I hope you will forgive my officiousness in acting without your leave."

"I understand that you have put in a copper."

"It hasn't damaged the property; I'll answer for that; and it was pretty badly wanted. If you'd looked at the place yourself—"

"Where is the copper set?"

"As a lean-to on the last house."

"What are the dimensions?"

Farquhar supplied him with precise particulars. "I happened to hear the story from one of your tenants, and I ordered the thing at once, without a thought of the landlord's right in the matter. When I did remember, it was too late; the work was begun. I can assure you, sir, that it actually adds to the value of the property."

"So I supposed. What should you say at a guess is the rental worth of the improvement?"

"Oh, something very small; not more than sixpence a week, sir."

Mr. Fane made an entry in his book. "Thank you; I am much obliged to you. Good-morning."

"You'll overlook my indiscretion?"

"Overlook it? Indiscretion? I am a poor man, and you have put into my pocket three shillings a week, Mr. Farquhar; I am greatly indebted to you."

"I have put into your pocket three shillings a week?"

"The additional rent of the six houses, you understand."

"You mean to raise the rent?"

"Certainly. Indiscriminate charity is against my principles."

"But, sir, they'll never be able to pay it."

"I shall, I hope, find other tenants who will."

"And the charity is mine, Mr. Fane."

"And the houses are mine, Mr. Farquhar. Would you be so good as to let yourself out? The men are out on the farm. You cannot well miss your way."

Farquhar took up his hat and retired. He really could not attempt to argue the matter, and was aware that he had been neatly outwitted. So great a philanthropist should have been saddened by thoughts of the Searles, victims of his blunder; but Noel Farquhar, as he walked down the hall, was smiling, in candid appreciation of the nice precision of his defeat.

## IV

MY ACTIONS ALWAYS HARMONISED
WITH MY OWN SWEET VOLITION;
I ALWAYS DID WHAT I DEVISED
AND RARELY ASKED PERMISSION.

ERE he was able to let himself out, however, he was recalled.

"Mr. Noel Farquhar!"

Farquhar turned, and saw on the stairs a girl with a small head and a crown of chestnut hair. She came leisurely down with her hand on the balustrade, planting each foot lightly but with decision; her gait was very characteristic. The light was from behind and left her features dark. When she had reached the hall, "I want to speak to you," said she, calmly; "please to come in here."

Farquhar held his peace and followed her into another low room, littered with more books and with Miss Fane's somewhat masculine appurtenances—a pair of dogskin gloves, a hard felt hat, and a riding-whip among them. Armorial bearings were carved upon the lintel and

traced again in silver upon the uprights of the andirons, across which logs were lying, in primitive style. The girl went first to the fire and stooped to warm her hands before she confronted him.

"Have you been talking to my father?"

"Am I speaking to Miss Fane?"

"Of course; why do you ask such a question as that?"

"Because I really was not sure; I thought you were younger."

"Most people know us by sight, though we are too wicked to be received," returned Miss Fane, indifferently. "I don't know whether you mistook me for a servant. However, that doesn't matter; have you been speaking to my father?"

"I came by appointment on a business matter, Miss Fane."

"About those cottages at Burnt House. You should have written to my brother Bernard; he manages the farm, and he is reasonable to deal with. Does my father mean to raise the rents?"

"He said such was his intention, but I hope he will think better of it."

"Oh no, he won't. Are you going to acquiesce, and let your protégés be evicted?"

"I can hardly make Mr. Fane lower the rents, can I?"

"You could make up the difference yourself."

As this was precisely what Farquhar had determined to do, he was, of course, struck by her intelligence. But he did his alms in modest secrecy. "I dare say they will find the extra sixpence," he said.

"They can't. Searle drinks, and the others are as bad, or worse. They're helpless."

Farquhar did not answer her. She had just moved into the sunlight, and he was startled by her beauty. No flower-loveliness was hers, delicate and evanescent; she glowed like a jewel with colour, the brighter for the sunlight which illumined the rich damask of her cheeks, the rich whiteness of her brow, the rich hazel of her eyes, the rich chestnut of her hair. Dolly Fane possessed in its full splendour the misnamed devil's beauty, the beauty of colour, vitality, youth. Her lips were virginally severe, her figure slight, girlishly formed, not yet mature; she was not so old, nor yet so self-possessed, as she wished to appear.

"Well, if you are giving in there is no more to be said," she added, with a slight contemptuous movement which was plainly a prelude to showing him out.

Farquhar hastily cast to the winds his modest reserve. "I am not giving in; I do mean to make up the difference," he said.

"You do?" said Dolly, fastening her eyes upon him.

"You're very charitable, Miss Fane," said Farquhar, smiling.

"Not in the least. I am sorry for Mrs. Searle; but I did not ask you for that reason. I wanted to see what you are like. You've spoken to my brother Bernard once or twice, haven't you?"

"I have; but he did not seem interested in my conversation."

"Oh, that's Bernard's way; he always thinks people mean to patronise him. You know London well, don't you?"

"I've lived a good deal in town, certainly."

"Should I pass muster in society?"

"Pass muster?" Farquhar repeated. It was not easy to abash him, but this young beauty, with her odd questions, contrived to do it.

"Yes. I know I am behaving in an unusual way now, but have I the accent and the appearance of a lady?"

"Most certainly you have."

"Do you think so? Should I get on in town? Do you think I am sufficiently presentable to be an actress?"

"An *actress?* Yes, I should say you were."

"You've not seen me act, of course; I can do it. And I've a passable voice, and I'm

fairly good-looking. Books say that theatre-goers will put up with poor acting for the sake of a pretty face; is that true?"

"It depends on the prettiness of the face. It would be true in your case."

"I don't in the least want compliments. I want the plain truth."

"And I'm giving it."

"Oh," said Dolly, evidently disconcerted. He had checked her for the minute, and she remained silent, though fresh questions were at her very lips.

"Are you fond of acting?" Farquhar asked, to loosen her tongue. "Are you burning to play Juliet?"

"Juliet? Oh no! I'd like to be Cleopatra or Lady Macbeth, though. Some one powerful and perhaps wicked; but not like La Dame aux Camélias, or Iris, or Agnes Ebbsmith. If *I* threw the Bible in the fire, I should keep it there."

"And make it eternal, and make it red-hot," suggested Farquhar.

"Did you read those lines? Aren't they good? Years ago I wrote them there, and father never could make me rub them out, though he tried with his riding-whip. But that wouldn't interest you. On your honour, do you think I should have a chance on the stage?"

"On my honour, I do. But why do you want to go? I should have thought you'd too much sense to be stage-struck."

"I'm not stage-struck, but I want to leave this place, and that seems the simplest way. We are badly off. I never see any one except my brother. I do not know how to behave. I have never had the chance of speaking to a gentleman before: which was why I called you in and asked you these questions. I expect no girl you know would have done it, would she?"

"You're right—she wouldn't; the more fool she, if she wanted the answer as badly as you did."

"Exactly," said Dolly; "for, after all, it doesn't matter what you think of me."

Farquhar slightly altered his whole bearing. He leaned against the chimney-piece and looked her in the face. "My opinion does matter, you know," he said. "I've some influence, which I could use either to promote or to frustrate your interests. I know plenty managers, and so forth, and I'm popular."

"It does not matter," Dolly corrected swiftly; "for I would under no circumstances consent to be beholden to you for anything beyond the piece of truth you've already given me."

"You're independent."

"I hope so."

"I'd much like to teach you to obey."

"Mathematicians have always wanted to square the circle."

"You've a will of your own; you're worth talking to."

"Is this how a gentleman speaks to a lady?"

"No, it's how a man speaks to a woman."

Dolly glanced out of the window. "That's my brother Bernard with his dogs. He stands six foot three, and he's the best wrestler in Kent."

"Meaning you'd set him to turn me out? He'd never do it."

"Do you think you're as strong as Bernard?"

"Stronger," answered Farquhar, stretching out his arm. Pride of strength was in that gesture, and more than pride—arrogance.

Dolly had a primitive admiration for strength, and his self-confidence tingled through her veins. She liked him the better that he was dangerous to handle; she was more at her ease that they were outside convention.

"At least, you're not stronger than Bernard plus half a dozen men whom I could call in a minute," she remarked, evenly. "Wouldn't it be wiser to make no fuss, but go?"

Farquhar started, passed his hand across his eyes, and looked at her earnestly, as though her words had wakened him. "Miss Fane, I

believe I've been saying the most outrageous things!" he exclaimed. "Haven't I? I don't know what possessed me. What have I said?"

"A little harmless nonsense, that's all," Dolly assured him.

"I must ask you to forgive me. To tell the truth, I'd a touch of sunstroke out in Africa, and since then I'm not my own master at times. I'm literally out of my wits. I don't know what I've said, but nothing was farther from my mind than any rudeness to you—to any lady. You will believe that?"

"Perhaps. Good-bye."

"You won't punish me by declining to speak to me?"

"We aren't likely to meet. Your friends don't know me."

"We shall meet, if you allow it. Will you?"

"Will I, now?" said Dolly. She went and threw open the door. "Good-morning."

Farquhar pleaded, but his words were wasted. Not a word more would Miss Fane say, and at last he took up his hat and walked out.

When she had watched him out of sight, Dolly went bareheaded across the lawn to a tool-shed under the trees, round which circled a numerous company of dogs, ranging from a smart terrier up to a huge grave brute, half bloodhound, half Great Dane, of the breed which

Virginian planters used in the good old days for tracking down their runaway slaves. Within, Dolly found the tall young fellow whom she had pointed out to Farquhar. He was darker than his sister, and not so handsome, but the two were plainly slips of the same tree. Bernard's manners needed attention. When his sister appeared he did not lay down his saw, which produced an ear-piercing rasping and ratching such as denied conversation. Dolly put her hand on his and arrested his work by force.

"Well, what did that chap Farquhar want?" asked Bernard, without resentment.

Dolly related Farquhar's doings at Burnt House, and the sequel. Bernard's comment was: "I guess he must be an ass," and he took up his saw to resume work, but was once more summarily stopped by his sister. These incidents were stages in the conversation; as people of quick wits often do when they live together, these two were in the habit of expressing themselves by signs.

"He's going to pay the difference himself, and not let father know," Dolly explained.

"Then I guess he's only a soft. But how did you hear?"

"I called him into the parlour and asked. I asked him whether I should succeed on the stage."

A pause, during which Bernard framed, and discarded as useless, a reproof. "What did he say?"

"He said I should."

"I don't see you can count that. I guess it wouldn't be good manners for him to tell you you wouldn't."

"He did mean it. He wasn't particularly polite."

"What did he do?"

"Oh, nothing actually rude. It was odd," said Dolly, reflectively. "At first he was—oh, Bernard, you know what I mean: turned out on a pattern and polished, like all the other gentlemen we've seen. I *was* rather nervous; but I meant to go through with it. Then his manner seemed to break in half. He was almost brutal. I must say I rather liked that; it was raw nature. And quite at the end he apologised, and said that he'd had sunstroke in Africa. Do you think that likely to be true?"

"I couldn't say," said Bernard. "I know he's been in Africa."

"What! out at the front? How painfully ordinary!"

"You do it very well," said Bernard, with admiration. "That was just like the woman in the black frills at Merton's. You'd soon be

as good as they are. Farquhar wasn't volunteering, though; he was up farther north, where they get miasma."

"Oh," said Dolly, leaning her elbows on the bench and her chin on her clasped hands. "Do you like him, Bernie?"

"Not if he was rude to you; though I guess swells generally are cads, like in books."

"He wasn't exactly rude. He was primitive. I should say he was very strong, and rather wicked, and subtle; not like us. We're quite simple, simplex, one-fold; we mean what we say and do what we mean, you and I."

"I should hope so," said Bernard, who was not troubled by uncertain ethics.

"Noel Farquhar doesn't, then; I'm sure of it. He is very strong. He says he is stronger than you are."

Bernard stretched out a brawny arm. "He's six inches shorter, anyway. At that rate he'd have to be a Hercules to lick me."

"I'd like you to wrestle with him. I'd like to see him thrown."

"Hullo, Dolly!"

"And I mean to meet him again."

"I know that isn't the proper thing. You ought to get introduced first."

"I can take care of myself. He interests me."

"You'll be falling in love with him if you don't look out."

"That I never should do. But he might fall in love with me."

"Shouldn't think that was likely."

"Why not? We Fanes are as good a family as any in England. And I'm handsome: Bernard, you said I was."

"Yes, but you aren't like the woman in the black frills," said Bernard, measuring his sister by the only standard of taste he knew. "Besides, I guess Merton's morally sure you were out poaching last time with me, and he and Farquhar are as thick as thieves. Girls oughtn't to poach."

"There are some people who don't class that among the seven deadly sins, and he's one; I know it. He has wild blood, as we have."

"But would you marry him if he wanted you to?"

"I'm not sure. I might. He could give me what I want—experience."

"I don't see why you aren't contented here," said Bernard, bending to his work again.

"I dare say not," retorted Dolly, pacing the shed. "You're phlegmatic You're content with the rind of life. Bitter or sweet, I mean to taste the core."

"I expect, you know, you'll come to awful grief."

"Perhaps. But so I've lived my life first, I'll not complain."

"Well," said Bernard, "I never saw you in heroics before, and I guess I don't care if I never do again."

Then he returned to his work, and drowned Dolly's aspirations in the harsh duet of squeaking saw and dissentient wood.

## V

### SHE GOES ON SUNDAY TO THE CHURCH

EUMENES FANE'S marriage had been both more respectable and more romantic than his kind enemies believed: living in Paris, he had eloped with a handsome, wilful French girl of noble family. Her relations swallowed the match as a bitter pill, his did not exist; and the married lovers lived in isolation far away in Brittany until death cut short their long honeymoon. Eumenes returned to England embittered; he had always been disagreeable. The relations between him and his children were eccentric. He lived with them, he had taught them, yet he lavished satire upon their boorishness and stupidity; he had been devoted to the mother, yet for the children he had no feeling but unamiable contempt. They, on their part, repaid him with indifference. Bernard at eighteen, on his own initiative, took control of the farm and made it pay; Dolly managed the dairy and the household. Their lives were isolated equally from their father

and from the world. Bernard was not much of a reader, and never strayed far from his Shakespeare and his farming journals, with excursions into Tennyson; but Dolly was insatiable. She had read and digested every book in their heterogeneous library. Unfortunately, the collection was not representative; the modern French novelists were there arranged in full tale, and fresh volumes were added as they appeared, but it had no single work of English fiction later than the date of the admirable *Sir Charles Grandison*. Both Bernard and Dolly could read and speak French as easily as English, though they did not know the worth of their accomplishment; and from their study of fin-de-siècle literature they had gained an innocently lurid knowledge of the world which hardly fitted in with the conditions of English country life, and was particularly inappropriate as applied to the blameless households at the vicarage, the surgery, or The Lilacs. When young Merton of The Hall brought home a pretty bride, Dolly seriously looked for the appearance of Tertium Quid. He delayed his coming for a year, and then arrived in the cradle. Dolly was surprised; but she ascribed this breach of custom to the fact that Merton senior's money was made in soap. Only the true aristocrats indulge in a friend of the house.

After Farquhar's visit Dolly made a dress for herself. It was then the fashion to wear a bodice opening at the sleeves and in front to show a lighter under-dress, which also appeared beneath the skirt, as the corolla of a flower beneath the calyx. Dolly's gown of dark chestnut matched her hair; the colour of the vest was white. She was more skilful in the dairy than with her needle, but she gave her mind to this, and in the end her work was crowned with fair success.

"I guess that colour, what they call, suits you," said Bernard, whom she called in to assist at the full-dress rehearsal.

"I expect it does," assented Dolly, bending back her swan's-neck to catch a glimpse of her supple young waist in the spotty mirror. "It fits rather badly; any one can see it is home-made, but that can't be helped. I am going to wear it to church on Christmas Day."

"Father 'll be awfully angry if you go to church."

"Of course, but that doesn't matter. No one except small shopkeepers and mill-girls goes to chapel now. Besides, the minister drops his h's and mixes his metaphors and talks the silliest nonsense: I wouldn't listen to him even if it were the fashion. Shall you come with me?"

"I guess I'd better. Have you seen that Farquhar chap again?"

"I have," Dolly answered, composedly.

"You'll get yourself into a mess if you don't look out."

"Oh no. He may get into a mess, but I shall not."

"Then I don't think you are playing fair."

"Yes, I am. He knows why I spoke to him."

"Why did you?"

"To know how ladies behave."

"I suppose you'll go your own way," said Bernard, after a pause; "but people 'll talk if you go on meeting him."

"Let them. I don't mean to stay down here."

"I do," said Bernard.

Dolly perceived the force of this objection. She valued Farquhar's advice; but where her own aims clashed with Bernard's well-being, she rarely hesitated.

"Very well; I won't meet him again," she said. "But, Bernard, if he speaks to you, do you respond. Ask him here; no one can find fault if I see him in my own house. Or I don't think they can; do you?"

She was reassured by Bernard's hearty assent, backed by a special instance. "For,"

said he, "when Maude had his sister staying here, Farquhar went and saw them; and I guess if he goes to Maude's house he can come to us." And the point was thus settled.

Two days before Christmas the wind blew softly from the south, the snow melted from the earth and the clouds from the sky, the robins broke out into their pure celestial strains, and it was spring in all but name. Farquhar's invalid began to pester his doctor for permission to go out, and Dolly got a white hat to go with her chestnut gown

Christmas Day itself was a flash of summer. Dolly came down dressed for church at half-past ten, and found her brother ready in a Norfolk jacket, knickerbockers, and a cap. An inward monitor told her that this attire was incorrect, and she said so; but as Bernard had nothing else to wear, the question *solvitur ambulando.*

Neither of them had ever been to church. In early days Bernard had been sent to a chapel with a damnatory creed, and he took his sister with him till she developed opinions of her own: an epoch early in Dolly's history. She rebelled: Bernard, who was bored by the service, outraged by the music, and submissive only from indifference, supported her: and Mr. Fane's graceless children took their own way,

and henceforth spent the Sabbath hours in reading, prefaced always by a chapter of the Bible.

They arrived late, having lingered in the woods because Dolly said, and Bernard agreed, that Mrs. Merton and the lady in the black frills had never entered the church till after the bells stopped ringing. Such is the force of bad example. Bernard held the door open for his sister, and followed her in, according to instructions which he had received from her, and she from Noel Farquhar. The aisles were crossed by dim sunbeams swimming with drowsy motes, the people were sleepy, the priest was monotoning monotonously out of tune; and Dolly's entrance, in company with a beam of pure sunshine and a gust of wind which set the Christmas wreaths rustling all round the church, electrified everybody. Heads turned to stare; the choristers, ever the devotees of inattention, nudged and whispered. Up the aisle came Dolly, a glowing piece of colour in her rich dress and richer hair, with the immaculate whiteness of her brow and the deepening carmine of her cheeks, her eyes shining like brown diamonds. She walked steadily, carrying her head high, up to the big square pew assigned by tradition to the house of Fanes, unlatched the door, and took her seat. Bernard followed, his height

and his patent unconcern making his figure quite as imposing as hers.

For a space Dolly knelt, as she saw others doing, and hid her hot face; but when the time came she rose, and pinched Bernard, who had sat down and stayed there. He got up slowly, plunged his hands into his pockets, and looked round him. Dolly was convinced that his behaviour was improper; she also looked round her, but without moving her head, and found her exemplar in the person of Noel Farquhar, who was attentively following the service in a large prayer-book. Three volumes lay on the shelf of their pew; Dolly opened one and handed another to her brother, signing to him to do his duty. He looked into it helplessly; it was a copy of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, and it is not surprising that he could not find the place. Dolly was no better off, but she had a model to imitate; she turned over the pages as though they were perfectly familiar, found her place near the beginning of the volume, and devoutly studied the evening hymns while the choristers chanted the Venite.

The recollection of that morning always brought a smile to Dolly's lips. Occupied by her culte of deportment, and still more by her culte of Bernard's deportment, she missed the humours at the moment, but found them all the

more amusing under the enchantment lent by distance. Bernard, who was not thinking about himself, was not amused. Music at chapel had been bad enough, but this, more ambitious, was really horrible. The choir sang neither better nor worse than most village performers; there was a preponderance of trebles out of tune and raucous, an absence of altos, two tenors who sang wrong, and three basses who sang treble. When they should have monotoned they climbed unevenly and one by one in linked sweetness long drawn out down a chromatic scale, until Bernard suddenly launched the true note at them in a voice of startling richness and power, which would have made his fortune had he taken it to market in town. It had the true bass quality, but an unusually extensive compass, ranging from the C below the bass clef up to the octave of middle C.

After he began to sing, most of the curious eyes were diverted from Dolly to him, and she regained her composure. Farquhar had not looked at her; it was not his cue to let his eye wander during service. But Dolly was sure, from the dark flush which overspread his face, that he had seen her enter. She designed this meeting as a test. If he refused to acknowledge her before his friends, Dolly vowed that she would never speak to him again. Her

pride of birth was keen; she went to the length of thinking her brother the only gentleman present, inasmuch as he alone, so far as she knew, had the right to bear arms. She took little part in the religious ceremonies. Dolly had her creed, and held to it in practice, but at this time she was too intent on this world to think much of the next.

She got up with alacrity after the benediction, and marshalled out Bernard, glad to go. The organist was now playing music soft and slow, and tenderly touching the pedals with boots so large that he frequently put down two notes at once by accident. Music was really the only subject about which Bernard was sensitive; as a false quantity to a Latinist, as a curse to a Quaker, as a red rag to a bull, so was a wrong note to Bernard Fane.

Outside shone the sun and breathed the wind and danced the grasses over the graves of women as young and beautiful as Dolly; but she was not thinking of them. The stream of people began to condense into groups of two and three, who gave each other the accustomed greetings and echoed cheerful wishes at cross purpose in a babel of inanity. Farquhar was shaking hands with Mrs. Merton, a fragile little lady with dark eyes, *frileuse*, as Dolly christened her, who dressed very well and talked plaintive

nonsense in an erratic fashion. Dolly knew by instinct that they were speaking of her. She went on at an even pace. Farquhar broke from his friends and followed, and Dolly, with true Christmas good-will in her heart, found herself shaking his hand in the overhand style, according to the custom of the lady in black frills.

"I wish I could walk home your way; I've a hundred things to say about that Burnt House business, and one never has a chance of seeing Mr. Fane. But I've an invalid at home who's to take his first airing to-day, and I know he'll go too far if I don't look after him."

"Is that the chap you picked up on the road?" asked Bernard, who had heard the story from the men, with romantic embellishments.

"Oh, I didn't pick him up; don't think it; he was planted on me by Providence. I say, Fane, if you've nothing better to do, I wish you'd come in to-night and have a knock-up at billiards. It would be a Christian act, for I've not a soul in the house except the invalid, who toddles off to bye-bye at seven."

"I can't play billiards," was Bernard's reply, rather proudly spoken.

"Right; I'll teach you. There's nothing I like better; is there, Mrs. Merton?"

"Don't ask me; I never pretend to fathom

you," said Mrs. Merton, plaintively, shaking her head. And she put out a very small hand to Dolly. "Please don't snub me, Miss Fane; I'd so like to come and call, if you'll let me. I was told you were a dreadful person, who dropped the h and divided the hoof—skirt, I mean; besides, it was your turn to call first on me. But you aren't dreadful, are you? So may I come?"

Had there been any patronage in Mrs. Merton's manner, Dolly would have been delighted to snub her; but there was none. The formula of gracious acceptance was less easy than a refusal, but Dolly let no one guess her difficulties. An interesting general discussion of the weather followed, during which one remarked that it gave the doctors quite a holiday, a second that it was muggy and unwholesome and why didn't we have a nice healthy frost, a third that it was excellent for the crops, and a fourth that the harvest would be certainly ruined by wireworms, and each agreed with all the rest. Bernard, standing still, thought fashionable people talked like imbeciles. Dolly, shy, though no one saw it, was in a glow of triumph.

Their way home led through woods. So much rain had fallen that the mossy bridle-path was scored with deep ruts full of water, and Dolly had to hold her skirt away from the black leaf-

mould. Rain-drops held in crumpled copper leaves shone gemlike, smooth young stems glistened; only the grey boles of the forest trees looked warm and dry. Dolly, herself like a russet leaf, harmonised with the woodland scenery, which seemed a frame made for her.

Farther on down the path, resignedly sitting on a bundle of fagots, and beginning to grow chilly, Lucian de Saumarez was waiting for some one to pass. He had set out with the virtuous intention of returning home in half an hour precisely, but had been lured on by a shrew-mouse, a squirrel, and the enchanting sun, till the end of his strength put a period to his walk; his legs gave way under him. Then he sat down and whistled "Just Break the News to Mother," very cheerfully. It was fortunate that in Bernard's hearing he did not attempt to sing, for his voice can only be described by the adjective squawky. He looked like a tramp who had stolen a coat, for over his own he wore one of Farquhar's, which was truly a giant's robe to him. At first glimpse of Dolly he whipped off his cap, and stood up bareheaded and recklessly polite.

"Excuse me—" he began.

"If you want relief, you'd better go to Alresworth workhouse; they'll take you in there,"

interrupted Bernard, who would never give to tramps.

"Be quiet, Bernard. Is there anything we can do for you?" asked Dolly, in her gentlest voice.

"Candidly, I only ask an arm, and not an alms," said Lucian, laughing in Bernard's face. "Fact is, I've walked up from The Lilacs and just petered out. Your woods are such a very remarkably long way through."

"Then your name is De Saumarez. Bernard, give Mr. de Saumarez your arm. You must come home with us and rest; afterwards you can go back. You ought not to be sitting down out-of-doors this weather," said Dolly, fixing her imperious young eyes upon him, between pity and severity.

"No, I'm an abomination, I confess it," answered the culprit, meekly.

"You must be feeling very tired."

"I'm feeling more like boned goose than anything else, especially in the legs. By-the-way, I wonder if Farquhar will leave his to look for the strayed lamb?"

"Let him; it won't do him any harm."

Lucian's eyes opened wide; Farquhar had described the ladies of Monkswell in picture-making phrases, and he was trying to fit this vivid young beauty into some one of the frames

provided, which all seemed too strait. "Am I speaking to Miss Maude?" he asked at a venture, choosing the likeliest.

"Oh no. I am Mirabelle Fane, and this is my brother Bernard."

"The dickens you are!" said Lucian to himself; for Farquhar, in relating the adventure of Mr. Fane and the copper, had not mentioned Miss Fane. Her foreign name and intonation caught Lucian's ear, and he asked if she were French.

"My mother was Comtesse de Beaufort," Dolly told him, and her naïve pride was quaint and pretty. Lucian mentioned Paris, and she fastened upon him with a string of eager questions, but put him to silence before half were answered, by declaring that he had talked too much.

"I've been off the silent list this fortnight past," Lucian pleaded.

"But you are already overtired. You ought to lie down directly you get in, and take a dose of cod-liver oil."

"I take cod-liver oil three times a day," Lucian assured her, with equal gravity.

"How? In port wine?"

"I should consider that a sacrilege. No; I will describe the operation," said Lucian, warming to his subject, which in any of his many conversations with pretty girls he had never dis-

cussed before. "I squeeze half a lemon into a wineglass, so; then I pour the oil in on it; next I squeeze the juice of the other half-lemon into another wineglass; and finally I swallow first the lemon plus oil and then the lemon solus. It is a process which requires great nicety and precision. Farquhar is not so careful as I could wish. Of course, it is nothing to him if I suffer."

"Port wine would be far more nourishing than lemon-juice," Dolly asseverated, knitting her brows. "Or milk would be better. Have you ever tried goat's milk?"

"I have not; is it a sovereign specific?"

"I have known it work wonderful cures on emaciated people. How much do you weigh?"

"Six stone eleven, I believe."

"That is far too little. You should test your weight every day—are you laughing at me?"

"I'm awfully sorry!" said Lucian, who certainly was. "But, Miss Fane, what a nurse you would make! I was expecting you to feel my pulse, and take my temperature, and look at my tongue."

"So I was intending to do; I have a clinical thermometer at home," Dolly proudly answered. "I do not know how to behave. I have never learned any manners."

"Say you've never learned customs; manners come by nature."

Lucian's smile was irresistible.

"Mine come very badly, then," said Dolly, smiling back at him; "for when we get in you will certainly have to lie down; and, what's more, I *shall* give you a glass of goat's milk."

## VI

### HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

A ROYAL stag, whose many-branched and palmate antlers showed that he had seen at least ten springs, looked down upon the mantelpiece of Noel Farquhar's library; a huge elk fronted him across the room. This style of decoration, which took its origin in the simple skull palisades of primitive Britain and latter-day Africa, which was handed down by the traditions of Tower Hill, and which is rampant in the modern hall, had in Noel Farquhar a devotee. The walls of his smoking-room bristled with the heads of digested enemies. Thither the two men repaired after dinner on Christmas night, taking with them a decanter of mid-century port, cigars of indubitable excellence, and a dish of nuts for Lucian, who took a childlike interest in extracting and peeling walnuts without breaking the kernel. Farquhar was inclined to be silent, in which mood Lucian, the student of the abnormal, found him specially interesting.

"Queer chap you are Farquhar," he suddenly remarked. "Why didn't you ever tell me about the fascinating Fanes?"

"Didn't I? I thought I had." Farquhar did not think any such thing, and Lucian knew it. "The day I went there Miss Dolly Fane stopped me in the hall, and would know whether I thought she'd make an actress. An odd girl."

"Well, and what did you say to her?"

"Said she would. I couldn't do otherwise, could I?"

"My immaculate friend, I'm afraid the charms of Miss Fane have persuaded you into a statement which is very remarkably near to a L, I, E, lie. At the least, you were disingenuous, decidedly."

"Who says I am immaculate? Not I. You thrust virtues upon me and then cry out when I don't come up to your notions of an archangel."

"And your church-going and your alms-giving and your brand-new coppers and general holiness? Eh, sonny?"

"I've a creed, as four-fifths of the men down here are supposed to have; but whereas they deny in their acts what they repeat with their tongues, I prefer to perform what I profess. There's a fine lack of logic about the way men

regard their faith; each time they repeat their Credo they're self-condemned fools. Well, I don't relish making a fool of myself. Either I'll be an infidel, and thus set myself free, or else I'll act up to what I say. For that you praise me. Now, the only virtue to which I do lay claim is patience, of which I think I possess an extraordinary store."

Lucian peeled a walnut with painstaking earnestness, and ate it with salt and pepper. The shell he flicked across at Farquhar, who had fallen into a brown study and was looking very grim. He looked up with a quick, involuntary smile.

"Did you shoot all these horned beasties yourself?" Lucian inquired, introducing the elk and the stag with a wave of the hand.

"Yes. I shot the elk in Russia; the horns weigh a good eighty pounds. Shy brutes they are, and fierce when at bay; this one lamed me with a kick after I thought I had done for him."

"My biggest bag was twenty sjamboks running," said Lucian, pensively. "I and some others were up country on a big shoot, and, of course, I got fever and had to lie up. Well, they used to come in with their blesbok and their springbok, and all the rest of it, so I didn't see why I shouldn't do a little on my own. So I lined up all our niggers with a sjambok apiece,

and made my bag from my couch of pain. I worked those sjamboks afterwards for all they were worth. Yes, sir-ree."

"Sometimes I really think you're daft, De Saumarez!"

"Pray don't mention it. Let's see, where were you? Oh, in Russia. No, I've never been there—I don't know Russia at all."

"I do."

"What, intimately?"

Farquhar turned his head, met Lucian's eyes, and smiled. "Oh no; quite slightly," he said, lying with candour and glee.

"Oh, indeed," said Lucian. "Now that's queer; I thought I'd met you there. By the way, do you believe in eternal constancy?"

"In what?"

"In eternal constancy; did you never hear of it before?"

"Well, yes, pulex irritans, I've seen a man go mourning all his life long; so I do believe in it."

"No, no, sonny; I'm not discussing its existence, but its merits. Do you hold that a man should be eternally faithful to the memory of a dead woman?"

"Not if he doesn't want to."

"My point is that he oughtn't to want to. See here; your body changes every seven years, and I'll be hanged if your mind doesn't change,

too. Now, your married couple change together and so keep abreast. But if the woman dies, she comes to a stop. In seven years the survivor will have grown right away from her. The constant husband prides himself on his loyalty, and is ashamed to admit even in camera that a resurrected wife wouldn't fit into his present life; but in nine cases out of ten the wound's healed and cicatrised, and only a sentimental scruple bars him from saying so. And there, as I take it, he's wrong."

"What would you have him do?"

"Take another woman and make her and himself happy."

"What becomes of the dead wife's point of view?"

"According to my creed, you know, she's got no point of view at all."

"You can't expect me to follow you there."

"No; and so I'll cite your own creed. After the resurrection there shall be no marrying or giving in marriage. She's no call to be jealous."

"You've no romance about you."

"No sentimentalism, you mean. Half the feelings consecrated by public opinion are trash. It's astounding how we do adore the dumps. Happiness is our first duty. It seems to me that one needs more courage to forget than to

remember. That's where I've been weak myself."

Lucian put his hand inside his coat and took out the letter which Farquhar had read; he had been leading up to this point. He spread it open on his knee, showing the thick, chafed, blue paper, the gilded monogram and daisy crest, the thin Italian writing. "I've carried that about for nine years," he said, glancing up, and then held the paper to the fire and watched it catch light. The advancing line of brown, the blue-edged flame, crept across the letter, leaving shrivelled ash in its track. Lucian held it till the heat scorched his fingers, and then let it fall in the fire. "A passionate letter, was it not?" he said, turning from the black, rustling tinder to meet Farquhar's eyes.

"My dear De Saumarez!"

"Don't humbug; you read it when you thought I was unconscious."

"Ah," said Farquhar, "now I understand why you understood."

He altered his pose slightly, relaxing as though freed from some slight, omnipresent constraint; the nature which confronted Lucian was different in gross and in detail from the mask of excellence which he had hitherto kept on. Vices were there, and virtues unsuspected: coarse, barbaric, potent qualities, dom-

inated by a will-power mightier than they. Race-characteristics, hitherto overlaid, suddenly started out; and Lucian, recurring quickly to the last fresh lie which Farquhar had told him, exclaimed, "Why, man, you're a Russian yourself!"

"Half-breed. My mother was Russian. My father was Scotch, but a naturalized Russian subject. The worse for him; he died in the mines. Confound him: a pretty ancestry he's given me, and a pretty job I've had to keep the story out of the papers. I've done it, though."

"But what's it for?" asked Lucian, whose mind was flying to the story of Jekyll and Hyde.

"Respectability; that's the god of England. Do you think I could confess myself the son of a couple of dirty Russian nihilists and keep my position? Not much. It's the only crevice in my armour. Scores of men have tried to get on by shamming virtuous, but I've gone one better than they; I *am* virtuous. You can't pick a hole in my character, because there's none to pick. I speak the truth, I do my duty, I'm honest and honourable down to the end of the whole fool's catalogue, I even go out of my way to be chivalrously charitable, as when I picked you up, or made a fool of myself over that confounded copper. That's all the political muck-worms find when they come

burrowing about me. Yes, honesty's the best policy; it pays."

"H'm! well, my most honourable friend, you'd find yourself in Queer Street if I related how you'd read my letter."

"Not in the least. I was glancing at it to find your address."

"You took a mighty long time over your glance."

"The paper was so much rubbed that I could hardly see where it began or ended."

"There was the monogram for a sign-post."

"Plenty women begin on the back sheet."

"You're abominable; faith, you are," said Lucian. "You're a regular prayer-mill of lies!"

"I'd never have touched it if I hadn't prepared my excuse beforehand. Ruin my career for the sake of reading an old love-letter? Not I!"

Even as Farquhar wished it, the contemptuous and insulting reference displeased Lucian; the letter was still sacred in his eyes. But he would not, and he did not, allow the feeling to be seen. Farquhar's measure of reserve was matched by his present openness; but Lucian, whose affairs were everybody's business, kept his mind as a fenced garden and a fountain sealed. Action and reaction are always equal

and opposite; the law is true in the moral as well as the physical world.

"Kindly speak of my letter with more respect, will you?" was all Lucian said.

"Oh, the letter was charming; I wish it had been addressed to me!"

"You shut up, and don't try to be a profane and foolish babbler. I want to know what it's all for—what's your aim and object, sonny?"

"I'm going to get into the Cabinet."

"You are, are you?" said Lucian. "And why not be premier?"

"And why not king? Because I happen to know my own limitations. I'll make a damned good understrapper, but the other's beyond me."

"You'll change your mind when you've got your wish."

"And there you're wrong. I'll be content then. I'm content now, for that matter. It's as good as a play to see how the virtuous people look up to me."

Lucian leaned back in the attitude proper to meditation, and studied his vis-à-vis over his joined finger-tips. Strength of body, strength of mind, a will keen as a knife-blade to cut through obstacles, an arrogant pride in himself and his sins, all these had writ themselves large on Farquhar's face; but the acute mind

of the critic was questing after more amiable qualities.

"And so you took me in as an instance of chivalrous charity, eh? And what do you keep me here for, now I'm sain and safe?"

"You're not well enough to be dismissed cured."

"I beg your pardon. I could go and hold horses to-morrow."

"I shall have to find some work for you before I let you go. I like to do the thing thoroughly."

"I see. I'm being kept as an object-lesson in generosity; is that so?"

"You've hit it," said Farquhar. "Hope you like the position. Have a cigar?"

"No, thanks. I don't mind being a sandwich-man, but I draw the line at an object-lesson." Lucian got up, and began buttoning his coat round him. "If that's your reason for keeping me, I'm off."

"De Saumarez, don't be a fool."

"I will not be an object-lesson," said Lucian, making for the door. "My conscience rebels against the deception. I will expire on your threshold."

Farquhar jumped up and put his back against the door. "Go and sit down, you fool!"

"I've not the slightest intention of sitting

down. I will be a body—a demd, damp, moist, unpleasant body."

"Do you mean this?"

"I do. I'm too proud to take money from a man who's not a friend."

Farquhar was very angry. He knew what Lucian wanted, but he would not say it. "Go, and be hanged to you, then!" he retorted, and flung round towards the fire.

"All right, I'm *going*," said Lucian, as he went into the hall.

He took his cap and his stick. Overcoat he had none, and he could not now borrow Farquhar's. His own clothes were inadequate even for mid-day wearing, and for night were absurd. All this Farquhar knew. He heard Lucian unbolt and unlock the front door, and presently the wind swept in, invaded the hall, and made Farquhar shiver, sitting by the fire. Lucian coughed.

Up sprang Farquhar; he ran into the hall, flung the door closed, caught Lucian round the shoulders, and in the impatient pride of his strength literally carried him back to the library close to the fire. "You fool!" he said. "You dashed fool!"

"Well?" said Lucian, looking up, laughing, from the sofa upon which he had been cast. "Own up! Why do you keep me here?"

"Because you have a damnable way of getting yourself liked. Because you're sick."

"Sh! don't swear like that, sonny; you really do shock me. And so you like me?"

"I've always a respect for people who find me out," retorted Farquhar. "The others—Lord, what fools—what fools colossal! But you've grit; you know your own mind; you do what you want, and not what your dashed twopenny-halfpenny passions want. Besides, you're ill," he wound up again, with a change of tone which sent Lucian's eyebrows up to his shaggy hair.

"You're a nice person for a small Sunday-school!" was his comment. "Well, well! So you profess yourself superior to dashed twopenny-halfpenny passions—such as affection, for example?"

"I was bound to stop you going. You'd have died at my door and made a scandal."

"You know very well that never entered your head. Take care what you say; I can still go, you know."

Farquhar laughed, half angry; he chafed under Lucian's control; would fain have denied it, but could not. "Confound you, I wish I'd never seen you!" he said.

"You'll wish that more before you've done. I'm safe to bring bad luck. Gimme your hand

and I'll tell your fortune. I can read the palm like any gypsy; got a drop of Romany blood in me, I guess."

"You'll not read mine," said Farquhar, grimly, putting it out.

"Won't I? Hullo! You've got a nice little handful!"

The hand was scarred from wrist to fingertips.

"Never noticed it before, did you? I'm pretty good at hiding it by now."

"How on earth was it done?"

"In hell—that's Africa. I told you I learned massage from an old Arab sheikh; well, I practised on him. I was alone and down with fever, and they don't have river police on the Lualaba. He made me his slave. Used to thrash me when he chose to say I'd not done my work; make me kneel at his feet and strike me on the face."

"Good Lord! How did you like that, sonny?"

"I smiled at him till he got sick of it. Then he put me on silence: one word, death. He thought he'd catch me out, but I'd no notion of that; I held my tongue. So one day the old devil sent me to fetch his knife. It was dusk, and I picked it up carelessly; the handle was white-hot. He'd tried that trick with slaves

before. Liked to see them howl and drop it, and then finish them off with the very identical knife—confound him!"

"Amen. And what did you do?"

"I? Brought him his knife by the blade; do you think I was going to let him cheat me out of my career?"

Lucian stared at him. "You—you!" he said. "And I verily believe the man's telling the truth. What happened next?"

"Something to do with termites that I won't repeat; it might make you ill."

"Only a channel steamer does that, sonny. You got away, though?"

"Eventually; half blind and deadly sick. By the way, you've not told me why you made up your mind to burn that letter at this precise time?"

"To draw you, of course. And now you'll be pleased to go and see that my room's ready; I can hear Bernard Fane hammering at the door, so you can play billiards with him while I go to bye-low."

## VII

### COURAGE QUAND MÊME

JANUARY came with the snow-drop, February brought the crocus, and March violets were empurpling the woods before the next scene came on the stage and introduced a new actor. In the meanwhile, Lucian continued to live on Noel Farquhar's bounty. It should have been an intolerable position, but Lucian's luckless head had received such severe bludgeonings at the hands of Fate that he was glad to hide it anywhere, and give his pride the congé. His choice lay between remaining with Farquhar, retiring to the workhouse, and expiring in a haystack without benefit of clergy; he chose the least heroic course, and, sad to say, he found it very pleasant.

One night alarm he gave Farquhar. Punctual to its time, the cold snap of mid-January arrived on the eleventh of the month, and Lucian went skating at Fanes. His tutelary divinity Dolly being absent, he was beguiled into staying late, got chilled, and awoke Farquhar

at three in the morning by one of his usual attacks. It was very slight and soon checked, but the incident strengthened the bond between them; for Lucian did not forget Farquhar's face when he found him fighting for breath, nor the lavish tenderness of his subsequent nursing, which seemed to be extorted from him by a force stronger than his would-be carelessness. That constraining force Lucian declined to christen: friendship seemed too mild a term for Farquhar's crude emotions.

No one could have felt more horribly ashamed than Lucian, on finding that his host gave up all engagements to wait upon him. He was soon about again, but he now guarded his health as though he had it on a repairing lease. When Dolly consulted him on points of etiquette, as she soon learned to do, he retaliated with questions concerning the proper conduct of an invalid; it is only fair to say that Dolly was the more correct informant. He was welcome at Fanes. Dolly liked him; so also did Bernard, whose affections were pure in quality, but exclusive; and fate gave him a third admirer in the person of Eumenes Fane, though the esteem in this case was but a bruised reed, liable to fail in time of stress. Farquhar, who was also a frequent visitor at Fanes, was not so popular.

On a fine morning in March, when the air felt like velvet and the linnets were beginning to nest, Bernard drove over to Swanborough market, as his habit was, to buy Dolly her week's stores. On his way home he met with an adventure. The distance from Swanborough to Monkswell by the London road was only fourteen miles; but Bernard's horse was young and fresh, and he chose a longer route through by-ways where there was less chance of meeting motors and traction-engines, Vronsky's special bugbears. Lonely, wild, and hilly was the country-side; the gold sun had just sunk behind the leafless woods, and a rosy twilight was invading the sky, when Bernard turned into a certain steep and narrow lane between high banks of violet-haunted grass, locally known as Hungrygut Bottom. As they spun down the slope, from behind them sounded the nasal Hoot! toot! which Vronsky hated. Bernard looked back over his shoulder. A small car with a single rider had topped the crest of the hill and was swiftly descending: too swiftly to be stopped at such short notice. Vronsky could be brought to tolerate a motor that he met; but to be overtaken and passed by one was more than his nerves could bear. Good whip though Bernard was, in this narrow lane he feared disaster. Midway down, where the banks

were lower, a gate stood open, leading into a meadow. Bernard touched up the horse, and made for this haven as fast as he could. But, as the dog-cart turned to enter, Vronsky caught sight of the appalling monster behind. He kicked, he danced, he stood on his hind-legs, he backed the dog-cart right across the road, and there he stayed, broadside on to the advancing motor, while Bernard set his teeth and awaited the crash. The car was almost upon them: suddenly it swerved violently to the left and flew up the bank. Right up to the top it ran, and upset. For a moment Bernard's heart was in his mouth as he thought to see it fall over sideways on the driver and burst into flames; but it rocked, and steadied, and stood in equilibrium, while the electric batteries came hurtling through the air into the road like so many fourteen-pound jampots.

Vronsky turned and bolted down the hill, and was some way up the opposite slope before Bernard could bring him to his senses. He came back as fast as he could, and found the driver sitting up beside his car, hatless, with a somewhat bewildered air. He had been pitched heels over head among the brambles close to a heap of flints, and there he had stayed.

"I say, are you hurt?" Bernard hailed him.

"I don't think so. I believe I still possess a head."

The voice was soft and low and lazy, with a touch of quaint humor. He looked up at Bernard without offering to rise. In the twilight Bernard could see only that he was tall and slight and young, and dressed in gray.

"It was an awfully plucky thing to do. If you'd come on I must have been killed," said Bernard, simply.

"Well, so must I, you know."

"No, you'd have been pitched out, and might have got off scot-free. It was about the pluckiest thing I've seen."

"The whole thing was my fault."

"It was the horse's fault, not yours at all."

"It was mine," said the stranger, with swift decision. "I was going too fast. I should have changed the speed to come down the hill, and I would not; I thought I should meet no one, and I chose to risk it. I shall have to give up motoring, I suppose."

"What on earth should you do that for?"

"Because otherwise I shall infallibly end by killing somebody."

"You needn't if you only take reasonable care."

"And that is precisely what I never shall do. There's a fascination about it—a sense of pow-

er—it's as fatal as gambling. Yes; I must give it up."

He got on his feet with an effort and regarded himself. Disgust at the mud on his clothes and his hands apparently preoccupied his mind, though he had scratched his face and bumped his head and bruised himself most thoroughly all down his side; in addition, Bernard saw that his right hand was streaming with blood This he had not noticed until Bernard pointed it out.

"Oh, that was the flints," he observed, in his former quaint and lazy way.

"Lucky for you you didn't fall right on them. Your wrist's cut to the bone."

"So I should fancy," said the stranger, wincing under Bernard's ministrations. He looked so faint with pain and loss of blood that Bernard went down to the dog-cart and brought up the flask which he carried in case of accidents; with Vronsky in the shafts they were to be expected. But when he got back the stranger was at the top of the bank examining his car, and rejected the brandy with thanks and scorn.

"It hasn't suffered much," he said, with satisfaction. "There's a small crack in the panel, but if I can get the batteries in I believe I shall be able to go on."

"You can't steer the thing with that wrist. You'd better come on with me to Dove Green; it's only a mile on, and you can send back for the car."

"One doesn't need two hands to steer."

"But you said you meant to give up motoring."

"So I do; which is an additional reason why I should drive it to-night, when I have the excuse."

"Do you *like* the thing?" exclaimed Bernard.

"Don't you like that handsome chestnut of yours?"

"Yes, but that's different. A horse has sense; you can't compare it to that beastly, snorting, smelling thing."

"If you'd ever driven a motor, you'd be ready to declare that it had sense, too; machinery's almost human, sometimes."

Bernard was wholly unconvinced, and thought the stranger a little mad. "You'd much better come on with me," he said.

"Thanks very much; but I have to get on to Monkswell this evening, and then back to Swanborough. I came this cross-country route because I thought I should have it to myself and could drive fast."

"Are you going to Monkswell?"

"I am; do you know it?"

"I live there."

"Do you? Then I expect you know my friends, the Mertons, at the Hall."

"M'yes."

"Ah! very likely we shall meet, then; I believe I am to stay there as soon as I get my next leave."

"No, I don't suppose we shall," Bernard answered. "We hardly know them; only on sufferance. They're a cut above us."

"I see."

The tone was neutral, it was too dark to read faces, and the stranger said no more. In a minute he was calling upon Bernard to help him set the motor on its wheels again, and together they dragged it down into the road, Bernard doing most of the work, for the stranger's strength was frail, like his physique.

"You're not fit to go on," were Bernard's last words, as the stranger settled uneasily into his seat, with a tender consideration for all his bruises and cuts. But he got no answer save a smile and a wave of the hand. He waited till the car was out of sight, and then fetched Vronsky out of the field and drove home without further incident.

He found Dolly waiting in the warm, dark parlor, reading by firelight, her feet on the mar-

ble rim of the hearth, her face close to the flames, which glowed and reddened the ceiling and flickered in gold on her hair. She raised a flushed face from her book: an intent reader was Dolly.

"Where have you been? You're late."

Bernard told his story in detail.

"I wonder who he can be?" Dolly said, nursing her chin in her hand.

"He was an awfully plucky chap, whoever he was. I never saw anything neater than the way he turned that machine up the bank; he kept so jolly cool. And he made his head spin, too, I'd bet; he'd got a lump on his forehead the size of a seed-potato, but he never said a word about it. Yes, he was plucky. I like that sort."

"Was he a gentleman?"

"Rather! A regular dude to look at; all his things were made in town, I guess."

"And coming to stay with the Mertons. I do wonder who he is?"

"Nobody we shall ever know, anyhow."

"Don't be so sure of that," said Dolly, wisely. "I shall ask Mr. de Saumarez."

Next morning Lucian came tapping at one of the less honourable doors of Fanes, and was bidden enter by a preoccupied voice. He found Dolly hard at work, with sleeves rolled

to the shoulders; she was in the second dairy, but her occupation had no fellowship with butter, cream, or cheese. A cool, dark, and lofty chamber it was, the walls midway to the roof being covered with white glazed tiles, the floor with red. Waist-high stood out a broad white shelf, now piled with square frames of unpainted deal confining square panes of glass, upon one of which Dolly was spreading soft white pomade with a palette-knife. A bushel-basket half filled with violets stood beside her; the air reeked with the scent of them. Lucian's curiosity found vent in the natural inquiry:

"What on earth are you doing?"

"Oh, it's you, is it?" Dolly glanced round, straightened her shoulders, swept her basket to the floor, and exposed a three-legged milking-stool. "There's a chair for you; you must not stand. I'm making scent."

"How enthralling! Mayn't I help?"

"Wait till you see how I do it," quoth prudent Dolly.

Lucian unwound a yard and a half of comforter, deposited his mackintosh, umbrella, and goloshes, and sat down to watch, tucking his long legs under the stool, and tossing back his shaggy brown hair. Dolly spread the white paste thickly and evenly over the glass in two

of the frames. Next she filled her hands with violets, decapitated the pretty blossoms, and sprinkled them broadcast on the pomade till the frame was full to the brim; she capped that frame with the second and pressed them close, so that they formed a box three inches deep, enclosing the violets between two layers of pomade; they were then ready to be put aside for the time being. She would not trust Lucian to spread the pomade, but she allowed him to behead the violets for her, and was grateful; for the quicker she was the fresher were the violets, and the more valuable the pomade made from them. Thrifty Dolly made a small income by her perfumes.

Her dress, between lavender and blue, just matched the blue chicory which borders August cornfields; and the cluster of violets which she had tucked into her bosom agreed with its color. She was bareheaded, and her hair glistened even in shadow like copper veined with gold. She was not thinking of herself, but of her violets, and Lucian's eyes were fixed on her to the hindrance of his work.

"You're leaving stalks on the flowers," Dolly pointed out.

"I couldn't help it. My eyes were all for you."

"Don't," said Dolly, brusquely.

"It's really the correct thing to say; besides, it's the truth."

"I don't like it, from you. How is your cough?"

"Mayn't I pay you compliments because I have a cough?"

"You may not; they don't sound appropriate."

"That's very cruel of you. I think I shall go home."

"No; wait till you're rested. Do you know if the Mertons have a young man coming to stay with them soon?"

"A young man, lydy? What's his name?"

"I don't know. He nearly killed Bernard and Vronsky with his motor-car, and Bernard was immensely taken with him. He is young, in the army, stationed at Swanborough, a friend of the Mertons, and Bernard generally calls him the dude."

Dolly's curiosity was not to be satisfied yet. Lucian shook his head.

"Couldn't say, my dear girl. There are any number of young officers at Swanborough, all as like as peas, and you can't call it a distinction to run down Vronsky. If he *hadn't* done it, now—"

"I thought you might have known from the Mertons; you know Mrs. Merton, don't you?"

"I used to, before she was married; I haven't kept up with all her distinguished acquaintances since. Ah! There were days when she loved me dearly. Once when I was a sandwich-man she walked up and down Fleet Street with me for an hour. I was carrying the advertisements of 'Woman—the Charmer,' and I could hear everybody saying it was an object-lesson."

Dolly had by this time heard a good many well-found anecdotes from Lucian, and had learned that his personal experiences were sometimes culled from another person's past. "I don't believe that," she said, calmly.

"Well, anyhow, she gave me a penny once when I begged of her—fact!" said Lucian, unabashed.

"Where?"

"At a fancy ball where I went got up as a blind beggar; I was the success of the evening. She's a right-down good sort, is little Ella Merton. You never told me how you got on when she called, by the way."

"I think, pretty well," said Dolly, doubtfully. "Fortunately, I saw the carriage driving down, and I sent Maggie to open the door, instead of going myself." Maggie was a little black-eyed maiden of fourteen, who helped in the housework. "I had put fresh flowers in the parlour that very morning, and I was

wearing this dress—now it is tumbled, but it was fresh then—"

"And you didn't change it?"

"No, I did not; should I have?"

"No, you did quite right, Sweet Lavender. Well?"

"I went in, and we talked. She stayed for an hour. Part of that time I was out fetching tea; it seemed rude, but I explained to her that Maggie was not strong enough to carry the silver salver. I used the red-and-gold china that you like, and there were scones and flead-cakes, and I put out some apricots in syrup; but very little of each, not as Bernard likes them. I thought that must be right, because she ate less even than you do. Was it?"

Lucian was laughing without disguise as he commended her wisdom. "And what did you talk about?"

"I don't quite know," said Dolly, doubtful again. "She really does say such strange things. Bernard will have it that she's crazy, but I think she's only clever. I should imagine her conversation was all epigrams and paradoxes."

"And what do you know about epigrams and paradoxes, pray?"

"Sometimes in reviewing society novels the newspapers give examples of the wit with which

they literally coruscate. I can't always follow them," said Dolly, who was candour itself, even to her own hindrance, "but I suppose that is because I don't understand the allusions. Mrs. Merton talks like them. Why do you laugh?"

"Mrs. Merton makes a point of talking sheer nonsense," said Lucian, as soon as he could speak. "I sha'n't send my novels to you for criticism. Something lingering, with boiling oil, is your idea of a mild review."

"If I thought them silly I should say so," said Dolly, calmly; "that is, if you wanted my opinion. But what ought I to do about Mrs. Merton's call? I am sure there is something, if I only knew what?"

Lucian promptly furnished her with information concerning the social laws in good society. In all innocence, he gave her counsels likely to raise the hair on Mrs. Merton's head if Dolly obeyed them. Many things Lucian could teach, but not propriety.

"But what's the use of this? I thought you were going on the stage," he said, breaking away. "You haven't forgotten about it, have you?"

"No, I've not forgotten," Dolly answered; and she put up her hand, which had just met his among the violets, perhaps to brush her hair back, and perhaps to conceal her face.

"What do you think of Mr. Farquhar?" she asked.

"Oho!" said Lucian, after one second's hesitation. "Well, he's the best hand at a friendship I ever met. But why?"

Dolly vouchsafed no answer to this question. "I am glad you think so; you who know him so well," she said, scattering her violets so carelessly that some of them fell to the floor. Lucian picked them up and coughed in stooping. "There! I have let you work too long. Sit; you must."

Lucian found himself maternally condemned to the milking-stool. His face darkened as he sat down; one might have thought him angry, but the shadow passed over his face and was gone. "My dear girl, why do you inquire about Farquhar?" he said, quietly persistent. "And why do you couple his name with your future? Go on; you may as well tell me."

Dolly hesitated. "There's nothing to tell," she said.

"Exactly so," said Lucian. "Lord! I never thought of that! I am an owl." And he fell into a brown-study.

Violets were clinging to Dolly's fingers and her arms; one was even swinging in a tendril of hair above her temple. As she went to put the last frame in its place, she crossed the solitary

sun-ray which shot through the deep, narrow window athwart the room, and was transfigured. Her very lashes shone like threads of gold.

"Let me do that," said Lucian, taking the frame away. Dolly stood watching him, as a woman will do when work is taken out of her hands. The pile of frames was high by now, and Lucian was careless; they tottered, and threatened to fall.

"Take care!" exclaimed Dolly; and her hand shot out beside Lucian's, to steady them. Round the curve of her bare arm twined a vein as blue as lazuli, winding inwards at the elbow, where a faint rose stained the clear milky alabaster. Lucian took it in the palm of his brown hand. "The loveliest thing I've seen in my life, Dolly," he said, softly.

The frames might fall, now; Dolly bent up her arm so quickly that she almost shut in Lucian's nose. The frames did not fall, however; for Lucian steadied them before he turned. A rose of indignation burned in Dolly's cheek; she was drawing down her sleeve to hide the insulted arm from view.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Lucian.

"I don't allow liberties of that kind," Dolly retorted.

"Candidly, it wasn't a liberty. An indiscretion, if you will, but I meant what I said."

"I think you had better go home."

"I will, in a minute. But, look here; if you shouldn't take Farquhar, would there be any chance for me?"

"You!" cried Dolly, her indignation changed to wide amazement. Lucian smiled.

"Now go and tell me that the words don't sound appropriate from me," he said, sweet-temperedly. "I'll be shot if I don't agree with you, too. They don't. A poor, rickety, ill-digested ostrich like me has no business in this galley. All the same, I don't believe in losing anything for want of asking. So if Farquhar by any chance doesn't suit, remember you've got another beau on your string — will you, dear?"

But Dolly stood silent, fastening the links at her wrist and beating the tiles with her foot. Her virginal dignity had been ruffled, but she did not care for that now.

"I thought we were friends!" she said.

"Aren't we?"

"Not if you are wanting this. How can we be?"

"All right, then, I *don't* want it. I guess I know my answer when I've got it."

Dolly took her eyes off the ground and fixed them on his face, using all her powers of observation and deduction. He stood laughing,

whimsical, insouciant, with his hands in his pockets, and defied them. But Dolly remembered that he had quoted her own words about his incapacity. "*Compliments don't sound appropriate from you.*" If they had not stung, they would have been forgotten. Dolly understood.

"I am sorry—I am sorry!" she exclaimed.

"My dear girl, don't distress yourself. I've had at least twenty affairs before, to say nothing of being actually married."

"Married!"

"All right, all right; I've no Italian wives up my sleeve. She's been dead these nine years past. I merely wish to point out to you that my heartstrings take cement. Look here, I'm going to call you Dolly; do you mind?"

"Is it the proper thing?" began Dolly, her eyes dancing.

"Yes, my dear girl; say we're cousins—we are, through Adam. Anyway, I'll do the lying for you; I'm handy at it. Are you going to have old Farquhar?"

"I don't know."

"You don't care for him?"

Dolly shook her head.

"That's a pity. But he's very keen on you?"

"How can I possibly tell? He's not said so."

"Don't be coy; now don't," said Lucian. "I'm anxious to further your happiness. Then, I take it, he's desperately smitten; h'm! he'll be neither to hold nor to bind, I'm thinking."

"I am sure this conversation is not at all the proper thing," said Dolly, demurely.

"It's not, like the holes in my elbows; you're right there. But look here; what I want to say is this: There's a heap of unregenerate wickedness in old Farquhar, as I reckon you've found out, but anybody he likes can lead him by the nose. I've heard him talk surprising bosh about his career, and the aims of his life, und so wieder; but I tell you he'd throw the whole cargo overboard to the sharks if it got in your way. You know what his arm's like? Well, he's got a mind made on the same pattern; and you, my dear, good girl, have got Samson in chains. And mind you don't play Delilah, or there'll be the etcetera to pay. That's the truth for you."

Dolly listened to this homily and did not commit herself. "I believe you really want me to marry him," was her comment.

"I'd dance at the wedding with a light heart," Lucian averred.

"That you should not; nothing could be worse for you."

"Look here, I've had one mother," said Lucian. "Be a sister for a change, now do."

"I like looking after you."

"So does Farquhar. Community of tastes—"

"Please, Mr. de Saumarez, will you go home? I've the dinner to lay."

"Lunch, we call it in society."

"I shall give you a dose of cod-liver oil if you don't go."

The threat was sufficient, and Lucian fled, forgetting his comforter and goloshes. Dolly swept the floor and washed the shelf and put all trim again. "I wish I loved him," once she said, and offered to her coldness the tribute of a sigh.

The rejected suitor did not at once return to The Lilacs. He made a détour through the church-yard, and sat down to meditate appropriately among the tombs. Lucian could not, like his friend, claim the consolations of religion, for he was an agnostic. That is to say, he acknowledged that he did not know anything; he did not boast that he knew nothing. Like poor James Thomson, he thought, as he saw the spire ascending to the blue and open sky, that it would be sweet to enter in, to kneel and pray; the pride of unbelief was not his sin. It

was a pity that he could not do it, because he had a natural gift for religion; and no one pretends that agnosticism, except that militant on a stump in Hyde Park, is a soul-satisfying creed.

L. of C.

# VIII

## "I HAVE THEE BY THE HANDS AND WILL NOT LET THEE GO"

THAT afternoon Dolly tied a handkerchief over her head and with Maggie's help spring-cleaned the parlour, an operation which involved the brushing, clapping, and dusting of every separate volume on the shelves. She moved the furniture out into the hall, swept the floor with tea-leaves mixed with violets, and had everything tidy in time for tea at half-past five. A capable housewife was Dolly Fane. But after tea she left Maggie to wash up, under orders to be careful of the Worcester china which Lucian admired, and herself went out for a walk to rest herself.

Beyond the stream a hill rose steep and grassy, crossed by the hedge-rows and sentinel elms of a Kentish lane, still netted in autumn's grey clematis, though violets blossomed thick below. Eglantine Lane was its local name; it was a lonely place, neglected by

the parish council, and voluminously muddy. A satirical notice-board announced that the authorities would not be responsible for injuries sustained by persons using the unmetalled part of the road, and another sign at the top of the hill described it truthfully as Dangerous to Cyclists. Dolly, nevertheless, scaled it without loss of breath; she had been on her feet since six in the morning, but she knew no better how to feel tired than the unfortunate Hans how to shiver and shake. Near the top was a gate and a stile, and a view of a field which had broken out into a black small-pox of heaps that were presently to be strewn over the soil. Fish-manure: as Dolly had known a month ago at Fanes, any day when the wind was blowing from the east. These are the vernal scents of happy Kent.

Dolly climbed upon the post of the stile to look at the crops and congratulate herself that Bernard was a better farmer than his neighbours. Bernard worked with his men, and was to be seen in due season carting manure with the best of them; though, afterwards, Dolly forbade him the parlour and grudged him the house until he had bathed and changed. Example is better than precept, and Fane's farm flourished while others declined; and Dolly, to whom Bernard was still the first man in the

world, glowed with sympathetic triumph in watching his fruitful acres.

She presently witnessed a touching scene. At a stone's-throw beyond the next bend stood a solitary cottage, and from the cottage came wandering a stray angel aged three, with blue eyes and golden curls and a brow of smutty pearl. The angel progressed erratically, chanting a ditty, and smiting the ground with a stick as tall as herself. So large a sceptre is awkward for handling, and it soon happened that it got between the angel's fat legs and upset her in the mire. The ditty became an ululation. Dolly was trying to screw her recalcitrant sympathy up to the point of sympathizing when a fresh actor appeared. Round the corner spun a cyclist at full speed, who came within a hair of involving the angel and himself in one red ruin. A skilful rider, he skirted the edge of tragedy and passed safely by, but immediately jumped off his bicycle and went back to see what was wrong. He heard a perfectly unintelligible tale of woe, ruined his handkerchief by using it as a towel, consoled the angel with a penny, and sent her off with a kiss.

The last was too much for Dolly; she laughed.

"Ah! it's you," said Farquhar. He wheeled his bicycle to the bank and came and leaned against the gate. Something in his tone and

his words, some threat in his manner (always the truthful index of his mood), prompted Dolly to say, in her chilliest tones:

"Are you going to stay?"

"I am."

"Then I'll go."

She put one hand on the post to vault down. Farquhar took her wrists and forcibly stayed her. "No, you won't; I want to talk to you."

"Talk, then; I won't answer you."

"Will you answer if I let you go?"

Dolly thought for a minute and slowly answered, "Yes."

"That's right," said Farquhar, releasing her. "I've been wanting to speak to you this month past. Why have you kept out of my way?"

"For the same reason that I'm speaking to you now: because I chose to."

"Because you chose to — Dolly, I swear I never saw a woman to compare with you for beauty! Why don't you ride? On horseback you'd be a queen."

"I used to, but my horse got staked and had to be shot."

"Were you on him?"

"I was; afterwards he was on me."

"My God! I'm glad I didn't see it."

"I was not hurt; and why should it affect you if I had been?"

"Anything affects me that has to do with you. I'm in love with you; you know it."

"How much?" inquired Dolly. He stood; she still sat on the gate, one foot swinging, and his face, thrown back to look up at her, fronted the sunset. Dolly felt like Fatima turning the little golden key, but she was at present mistress of the situation, and her spirits rose. "How much?" she said again.

"You want the whole fool's catalogue? Hear, then: you're heaven and earth and hell, sun and darkness, flower and dove and angel, light of my soul, fire in my veins—no! I'll be hanged if those trashy similes will serve! I'll tell you what you're like: quick-lime in the eyes, vitriol on the naked flesh. See there!"—he pushed his sleeve up (Dolly, though her nerves were tolerably steady, uttered an exclamation) —"see those scars? I'll tell you what they are —ants. I've been tied up to be eaten alive by them. You put it to yourself what that's like. Well, I'd stand that all over again sooner than have you refuse me."

That he was sincere and spoke the truth Dolly could not doubt, and he made her sick; she turned away her face. Farquhar dropped from passion to passionate entreaty, his voice sank to a murmur, he captured her hand and pressed it to his cold cheek. "Dolly, Dolly, give your-

self to me, and I'll make you love me; I swear it. You're my only one, my own; I'd not snap my fingers to win a queen. I've never so much as kissed a woman before. You'll never have a man say that to you again and tell the truth. And I'll never change; don't you make any error about that. What I say to-day I'll say again in fifty years, when you're old and ugly. Only come to me, Dolly; do come to me. Dolly, Dolly!" He was covering her palm with kisses; his lips were hot, though he was shivering, or rather shuddering. "If you'll only come, I'll make you love me," he said, lifting his face; and the surprising strength of his passion made Dolly own that the boast was likely to prove true. She was moved. Bluebeard's chamber was worth exploring; but she did not want to stay there.

"Well, I don't love you, Mr. Farquhar," she said, calmly. "I hate the way you talk, and I mean to be my own mistress awhile yet."

"I'll say no word that could hurt a child."

"What's the use of that? Your thoughts are all wrong."

"I'll keep my thoughts in as I keep my tongue."

"No," said Dolly, with mounting spirit.

Farquhar bent his head against her knee and breathed hard. When he looked up he was

haggard. He was suffering there before her eyes, but hardily.

"I'll not take that answer as final," said he.

"It's not meant to be. I want time to think."

"Do you? I'll have you yet."

"Don't be so sure. I'd far rather marry Mr. de Saumarez."

"Has that miserable little etiolated pensioner of mine dared to come after you?"

"Don't speak of my friend so, if you please."

"Would you like me to go and beg his pardon? I'd do it, if you told me."

Only the thought of Lucian's disgust kept Dolly back from taking him at his word. "I like Mr. de Saumarez, and I don't think I like you at all. But you can give me the position I want, and he can't. I want time to think it over. Come to me three months hence, and I'll tell you my decision."

"Do you like love at second-hand? De Saumarez has carried his sweetheart's letter against his heart for nine years, and she wasn't you."

"I'd like his love at tenth-hand better than yours," said Dolly, with spirit.

Farquhar laughed grimly. "And there you're wrong, my dear. I love you pretty decently well, though I'll admit there's a bit of the devil

in me. You want me to wait three months? All right; only I warn you that my position and, consequently, your ambition 'll suffer."

"Why?"

"Do you expect me to reel out platitudes in Parliament while you're playing the deuce with me? Not much! And if I hold my tongue this session, I may as well take the Chiltern Hundreds."

"Nonsense," said Dolly, a trifle cross. "You could do it if you tried. Of course, if you lose your position you won't be so eligible."

"Hard lines; you put me on the rack and punish me for being disabled. But I'll have you yet, in spite of yourself."

"You may," retorted Dolly, "or, on the other hand, you mayn't."

"I shall."

"Peut-être. Please to move, Mr. Farquhar, I want to get down."

"Wait a moment. A kiss first, if you please."

"I will not! Take your arm away."

"No," said Farquhar, evenly. "I'm going to have one."

"I'll never give it you."

"I'll take it, then."

"Do you think this is the way to make me have you?"

"I do; a woman's never mistress of herself till she's been mastered by a man."

"Don't apply your aphorisms to me, if you please; I'm not like the women you know."

"Aren't you? That's where you make a mistake, my girl; women never know themselves."

"I know myself well enough to be sure I'm not going to kiss you."

"Very possibly you aren't; that's not the point, though I should like you to. I'm going to kiss you."

"Let me go!"

"One kiss, Dolly."

"Let me go!" Dolly repeated, struggling against him. She would have had a chance with any other man, for she was strong and supple and desperate; but Noel Farquhar's arms closed round her like a snake's constricting folds. Though the cottage was within earshot, Dolly would have died sooner than call for help. She went on fighting, and when he drew her down she turned her face away. Uselessly: Farquhar's hand was laid against her cheek, and he bent her face to his. They looked into each other's eyes: Dolly's all rebellion, his all fire; and then he kissed her.

Once only; he had sufficient self-control to let her go when he had kept his word. Dolly pulled out her handkerchief to brush it away.

If she had had a knife she would have used it against him; yet behind her anger there was an unwilling respect. That immense strength which she could not defy, the strength of will as well as the strength of body, had left its impression. Farquhar was right in thinking that he had stamped his claims upon her memory. It was better that she should say, as she did, "I hate you from the bottom of my heart," than that she should part from him in a mood of calm and confident triumph.

"Well, I love you," he answered her, simply. "There; I beg your pardon. You'll not forgive me, of course, but—well, there are times when I wonder if I'm mad."

"You've made that excuse before; try something fresh."

"Did I? It's the truth. Dolly, you—" He put up his hand over his eyes. "Sheer madness; or say I'm drunk. Dolly, what—what eyes you've got!"

That was the last she heard from him that night. They parted, he taking a footpath to The Lilacs. He forgot his bicycle, and Dolly, seeing it, wheeled it down to Fanes to the safe custody of the tool-shed, not without some pride in an affection which could make a man oblivious of a very handsome, free-wheeled, Bowden-braked, acetylene-lamped, silver-plated, thirty-

guinea Singer. At that hour Lucian's chances were poor.

"Where have you been?" was Bernard's greeting when she came into the parlour. "Merton's been here, and left a note for you."

"Did you see him in those slippers?" exclaimed Dolly, pointing at the purple cross-stitched pansies which spread their blossoms over Bernard's instep. Bernard looked at them himself.

"They're all right; they haven't got any holes," he said.

"I'm sure gentlemen don't wear such things. In the evening they wear—they wear pumps."

"They may wear pumps or they may wear buckets," Bernard responded. "I guess I don't much care. Old Merton wears slippers, for I've seen 'em on him. You open the letter and see what Mrs. Merton says—if she writes so that you can understand her, that is."

Dolly perused the note, written in a random, spidery fashion upon hand-made paper. "She wants us to dine there on Thursday," she said, tapping her lips with the paper in a thoughtful manner.

"Thursday? I shall be at Swanborough market."

"Dinner means eight o'clock in the evening; you'll be home then."

"Oh, I forgot," said Bernard. "Shall you accept?"

Dolly did not reply, but continued to tap her lips. Mrs. Merton had been at the pains of mentioning her other invited guests. Presently Dolly said, "Bernard."

"Well."

"I've had two offers of marriage to-day."

"I'm glad Farquhar's come up to the scratch. I didn't want to have to thrash him. But who's the other?"

"Lucian de Saumarez."

"Him!" exclaimed Bernard. "Dolly, I'd take him; I like him."

"Oh, I know, I know; so do I. But he hasn't a penny."

"He'd take you about and show you things."

"Quite so; out of a third-class window. I don't care for that."

"You aren't going to have that Farquhar chap?"

"I've not quite made up my mind."

"Well, you'll be a fool if you choose him," said Bernard, returning to the *Daily Telegraph;* and human nature is so constituted that at that moment Dolly would have accepted Farquhar on the spot, had he been present.

The clock struck nine. Dolly got up, extended her arms above her head, and yawned.

"Oh, I *am* sleepy," she said. "Good-night, Bernard."

"'D-night," answered Bernard, deep in the finance news.

Dolly moved towards the door; then, a certain thought crossing her mind, she came to Bernard's chair and bent her beautiful head.

"Give me a kiss, Bernie."

Somewhat surprised, Bernard complied.

"Do you like kissing me, Bernard?"

"M'yes. I don't mind it. Why?"

"Ah!" said Dolly, and lighted her candle for bed.

## IX

### WE TOOK SWEET COUNSEL TOGETHER

LUCIAN was a poor sleeper, hard to lull and easy to rouse, with a habit of waking at four in the morning and reading novels in bed; his good nights had six hours' sleep, his bad nights none. As a young man, he had innocently done his best to acquire the chloral habit, but years had taught him wisdom; his present panacea was bromide of potassium, of which, at times, he took a surprising quantity. But he shunned it whenever he could.

Excitements in the day usually entailed sleeplessness at night. After Dolly refused him Lucian was not surprised to find himself broad awake at one o'clock in the morning, with every prospect of remaining so. But the dark hours had long ceased to seem interminable; he lighted the gas, enshrouded himself in a gorgeous dressing-gown, in whose gay colours he took an artless pleasure, and devoted his mind to the *Golden Novelettes*, at a penny a number. Since Lucian's last illness, Farquhar slept in the

dressing-room adjoining, and usually left the communicating door ajar; but Lucian had wisely shut it early in the evening, and was blest in solitude.

Towards dawn a voice came through that closed door, repeating the very name which was running in Lucian's thoughts. "Dolly, Dolly!" Lucian took it for the creature of his brain, and thought with joy that now he might legitimately take some bromide; but it came again, and was this time coupled with epithets which had never crossed Lucian's mind, still less his lips. He divined that something was wrong with Farquhar, and slid off his bed to see, taking a candle. Farquhar lay on his back, restlessly muttering, between sleep and delirium; his face was flushed and his skin dry. "Fever," said Lucian, and sat down to watch.

Fever ravings are not commonly coherent, nor do patients, except in books, relate at length the stories of their lives; all that Lucian learned was some strange oaths, besides the fact that Farquhar wanted water. He supplied that desire liberally, and presently had the satisfaction of seeing Farquhar wake up and stare about him with the air of a man newly released from Incubus.

"Fever, sonny?" said Lucian. "How did you pick up that?"

"In Africa. Yes, I'm let in for it occasionally—curse the place! I've had a pretty bad turn, I reckon. Where's that clinical?"

The thermometer when consulted climbed to a hundred and three, and Farquhar decreed quinine. Hurrying off to prevent him in getting it, Lucian caught the tail of his robe in the fire-irons and dragged the fender half across the room before he could stop. He turned round and solemnly cursed it with a malediction exceeding that of the Cardinal Lord Archbishop of Rheims. Farquhar flung a pillow to speed him on his way, and Lucian stepped backward into the water-jug.

When this contretemps had been arranged with the help of the towels, Lucian sat on the bed—a quaint figure, with his bright eyes and brown face and draggle-tailed dressing-gown, the skirt of which he carefully spread over a chair to keep it away from his ankles.

"You ought to be in bed," said Farquhar, impatiently; "not sitting up and playing the fool with me. Phew! how hot it is!"

"Oh, I'm not asking for any flowers on my grave," said Lucian. "I like doing it. And, look here, Farquhar; I don't want to be inquisitive, but have you been making love to Miss what's-her-name?"

Farquhar sprang up. "What's it to you if I have?"

"Something, sonny; because I happen to have been making love to her myself."

"Yes, confound you! Living here on my charity, and by way of return you make love to my girl on the sly."

"Farquhar, you shut up and lie down," said Lucian, authoritatively.

Tormented with fever and worse tormented with jealousy, midway between love and friendship, Farquhar hesitated; but he finished by obeying. He flung up his scarred hand over his eyes and breathed deeply, longing for coolness. "Put that light out," he said, "it drives me wild. I'll be right enough to-morrow, but I'm ill now, and that's the fact. Ill! I'm parching!"

Lucian snuffed out the candle neatly between his finger and thumb, an inelegant trick which has the advantage of killing the smell. "You been popping the question?" he asked, and dropped his long cold fingers across Farquhar's forehead.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I'm to wait three months."

"What on earth for?"

"She wants to consider my virtues—and yours."

"Mine? Oh, I'm out of the running; I only put myself forward as a pis-aller, in case you didn't suit."

"You're not out of the running. I shouldn't wonder if she took you. She says she likes you better than me."

"You sure of that?"

"She told me so to my face. I wished her in Hades."

"You've got it badly, sonny, very badly; but I'd rather you didn't swear at her."

"Badly? Yes. But I'll tell you what's playing the mischief with me—I kissed her."

"She let you?"

Farquhar laughed. "I took it."

"Oho, my irreverent friend, you did, did you?"

"I did. Heavenly sweet it was, too; where do they get it, these girls, the power to drive a man sheer mad—hold on, will you? you dashed fool! That's meant for me, De Saumarez, not you."

"It's a fact," said Lucian, "that I never could resist a kiss myself. After all, there's no harm in it, and it's mighty agreeable when both parties are willing; though I take it Miss Dolly was not?"

"She wasn't. You're right there."

"Upon my solemn honour, I wish I could thrash you!"

A scratch and a spurt of white flame: Farquhar had struck a lucifer. The outleap of light showed Lucian's unguarded face and was gone.

"My God!" said Farquhar, "and it's the truth!"

Lucian got up, went into his own room, and shut himself in. An instant later there shone again the lighted parallelogram of the open doorway with his figure black against it, as he came stoically back to his place on the bed. Farquhar said through the darkness, "I'll be damned if you shall get her."

"I'll be damned if you shall," Lucian answered.

Truth cleared the air, as it generally does. They had been in deadly jealousy the minute before, but now a spirit of Christian charity fell upon them.

"She's safe to choose you," Lucian argued. "She's as ambitious as she can stand, and look at me! I don't know which is more invalid, my health or my prospects."

"Well, I won't be taken for my money. You see here: didn't you say you could model and carve? I've just bought a granite-quarry in the Ardennes, and I'll put you in as managing partner, and in three months you'll be talking differently."

"I bet you a shilling you'll go bankrupt if you do!"

"Betting's contrary to Christian principles."

They both laughed, and then Lucian said: "Seems to me you rather enjoy shamming virtuous, you consummate old humbug!"

"I do; hadn't you found that out?"

"I can believe virtue comes easier when it's a vice," said Lucian, meditatively; "but it strikes me very forcibly, sonny, that patient continuance in well-doing has undermined your principles. You'd feel pretty awkward at going to the deuce."

"Would I? If I had that girl in my power, I'd be handy enough."

"I deny it; but let that pass. Anyhow, if you had me in your power you wouldn't lift a finger against me."

"If you got between me and her—"

"You'd say, 'Confound you, my children!' and bite your thumb at us."

"For my own sake and not yours, then; I never did an unselfish thing yet."

"Oh, you are a liar," said Lucian. "Why *do* you tell such lies? And, look here; I've something serious to say to you. I won't put up with being told I live on your charity, not even when you're sick."

"I shall say what I please."

"And I shall go when I please."

"Oh, confound you!" said Farquhar; and he laughed and acquiesced.

As has been said, Dolly was at this time inclining towards Farquhar, but an episode of the next week set the rivals even again. She and Bernard accepted Mrs. Merton's invitation. She bought a book on etiquette and studied it, but was nervous, nevertheless. Bernard also studied the book, because he wished to avoid blunders, but he remained perfectly composed; a point illustrating the radical difference between their characters. Bernard took in to dinner a pretty, clever, well-bred, well-dressed girl of five-and-twenty, who had heard his story, was impressed by his looks, and took an interest in him, as she told Mrs. Merton. She tried to draw him out and put him at his ease, and their conversation grew rather humourous ere she recognized her error.

Dolly's partner was a big, dark, heavy-featured man, with a low, soft, monotonous voice and tired eyes. Hugh Meryon was Hugh Meryon to Dolly, and he was nothing more; but at Monaco he was known as Gambling Meryon, for among gamblers his play was remarkable by reason of his extraordinary and fantastic luck. He was the son of a highly respectable

dean, and had suffered a highly respectable education; but he was born to gamble as the sparks fly upward, and gamble he did, sacrificing all to his passion. He loved the excitement, not the money won: like Fox, who declared that his favourite occupation was playing and winning, his second favourite playing and losing. His presence at Monkswell was due to Mrs. Merton's fondness for black sheep, mustard with mutton, and other things which she should not have liked.

"I hear De Saumarez was to have come to-night," Meryon began, without preface, before the advent of the soup. "I'm awfully sorry he couldn't, I wanted to see him again. Do you know him?"

"Do *you* know him?" Dolly exclaimed, simultaneously.

"Oh yes; I used to know him pretty well, but I haven't seen him for nine years. But he's the sort of fellow one doesn't forget; besides, I was there when his wife died."

"Did you know her? What was she like?"

"Awfully delicate, and quite young and very pretty. De Saumarez was mad about her, waited on her hand and foot, though he wasn't much good himself. You used to see him taking her out in a bath-chair and dodging the stones for fear they should jolt her— I'm

boring you!" Meryon was diffident, and always expected to be found a bore; he had taken fright now at his own fluency, and annoyed Dolly inexpressibly by trying to talk about the weather, which he could not do. It was several minutes before she got him on the track again.

"What was wrong with Mrs. de Saumarez?"

"Consumption."

"He's afraid of that himself now."

"Is he? I expect he's caught it from her—doctors say you can, and he was always with her. But the queerest part of it all was the end."

"Yes?" said Dolly, softly. Meryon had forgotten her, and she thought it safer to let him forget, lest he should shy again. The gambler went on, simply:

"He came in to me one night looking rather wild and asked me to play. I didn't want to; I didn't want to clean him out with his wife sick, and I knew my next streak of luck was about due. And once I begin I can't leave off—the cards won't let you go till they've had their sport out. But he would have it. Écarté we chose; I could tell every card in every game we played, and that was fifty-three—but that wouldn't interest you. Anyway, I've seen queer things in the cards, but never anything

so queer as that night's play. I dare say you've heard that gamblers say spades mean death. Well, the king of spades kept on haunting us, and every time the black suit showed I swept the board. He kept on doubling the stakes, and I—I lost my head, as I always do, so when we came to the end of the spell and counted up I found I'd won sixteen thousand of him; only fancy! He swore that Marguerite—his wife, you know—was provided for, but I didn't believe him, for he was just as if he were fey. So then he asked me to come in and see her and convince myself, and I said I would, then and there, though it was three in the morning. I was pretty queer, for the cards had got into my head, and I was counting the steps and multiplying them by the stones on the pavement, and I was mad with myself besides, and I thought I might get her to take it back, or some of it. Well, he took me in and up; I didn't know where he was going till he threw open a door, and there we were in her room, and there was she laid out on the bed, dead. Candles at the four corners, and flowers all about—I never shall forget it." He shuddered and stopped.

"And Mr. de Saumarez?"

"Oh, he was like a lunatic—talking to her—He'd put by money for the funeral; that's what

he meant by saying she was provided for. He hadn't ten shillings himself. I tried to get him to take some, but he went off after the funeral, and I didn't see him again. I never have, till now. I swore I'd never touch a card again, after that."

"And did you keep your vow?" Dolly asked, not because she had much curiosity upon the subject; one is not greatly interested in the feelings of a phonograph.

"Yes, till a girl I knew asked me to play—I couldn't refuse her."

"Did she know of your promise?"

"Yes, but she wanted me to play specially. You see, I had rather a name; my luck's so queer. She was writing a book about it; besides, she didn't quite understand."

"And afterwards?"

"Oh, afterwards, I just went on playing. It didn't seem worth while not to, you know," said the gambler, with his tired smile.

# X

## WAS THAT THE LANDMARK?

AS a hostess Mrs. Merton possessed a penetrating amiability which could persuade the lioness to lie down with the lamb, and could temporarily repair rifts in the social lute so well that it would run up and down the social scale without any disconcerting discords. When she brought up her women guests after dinner, they gathered round the fire and gossipped like school-girls. Sitting next the mantel-piece with her shoes on the tiled hearth, shielding her face with a peacock-feather fan, Bernard's pretty partner was holding forth concerning flirtation. She had thin little features and a retroussé nose, and she lifted and moved her head like a bird; her thick, curly fair hair was cut short; her eyes were gray and clear, and not a little imperious. In dress she was so demure and simple that Dolly set her down as a great heiress, not discerning that her demure simplicity was of the kind that comes from Paris.

"No. I detest flirtation," she was saying. "It is an appeal to the vulgarity of our natures. It may be fit for men, but not for women."

"My dear girl," drawled her vis-à-vis, a plain but well-dressed young matron with fine dark eyes: "you never set eyes on Hugh Meryon before to-day, and you sat in the brambles with him the whole afternoon!"

"She was converting him," said Ella Merton. "She belongs to the Anti-Gambling League, don't you, Angela? and she had to gambol around him to lure him away."

"Always think that people are like consols, they lose interest when they're converted," murmured the dark-eyed matron, whom Dolly recognized as the lady in the black frills.

"Maud, don't be flippant," said Angela, not at all disconcerted. "If you know Mr. Meryon, you must know that he absolutely can't flirt. That's why I like him."

"I like flirting," said Maud; "it's so desperately interesting. Talking sense is such a desperate bore, you know. It's all very well for you, my dear girl; men 'll listen to an angel that's paid a visit to Worth. But with my sallow complexion it's simply suicidal."

"Men who flirt are no better than city clerks who kiss their best girls under the mistletoe at

suburban tea-parties," said Angela, elevating her little pointed chin.

"Now, I like that kind of young man," said Ella: "besides, they don't exist. She won't talk like this when she's married, will she, Maud?"

"I never shall marry," Angela asseverated. "To decline a proposal is bad enough, but to accept one—horrible!"

"Don't see where the horrors come in," murmured Maud, placidly. "I suppose my sensibilities aren't fine enough. I've always enjoyed it."

"I dislike the ceremony of kissing," said Angela, throwing down the gauntlet.

"It isn't a ceremony, it's one of the rites of women," said Ella, dissolving into laughter.

Angela laughed too. She was in earnest, but not to the extent of becoming a bore. "I believe in the rights of women," she said. "Don't you agree with me, Miss Fane?"

"About kissing?" said Dolly, "I don't think it matters much; a kiss means nothing."

Angela looked rather horrified; Maud Prideaux smiled behind her fan; Mrs. Merton was frankly interested. "What a lovely original idea!" she said. "All the three-volume novels used to end with the first kiss. Lord Arthur saw sanctified snakes, and Lady Imogen felt

the tide of love bearing her away and her hair came down. And in girls' stories it's the bell that rings down the curtain on the sacred scene. And you don't believe in it?"

"No," said Dolly, speaking in her swift, straightforward way. "A kiss is a touch and nothing more, neither pleasant nor the reverse. What I should dislike would be to be kissed against my will."

"You're quite a revolutionary, Miss Fane," drawled Mrs. Prideaux. "I sha'n't let my husband talk to you."

"With your sallow complexion it would be simply suicidal," Mrs. Merton agreed, smoothly.

Maud Prideaux's cynicism was pointed by the fact that she and her husband were notoriously devoted.

"I'd trust Lal anywhere," said Angela Laurenson, half to herself.

"Oh, Lal! but we all know that Lal's perfection. When's he coming, Angela? I wonder you exist without him," said Mrs. Prideaux. Angela coloured, but she stood her ground.

"To-morrow, I expect," she said. "I hoped he would be here to-night, but he said he might not be able to get off."

"Then we shall have to be on our best be-

haviour—" Mrs. Prideaux was beginning, when the gentlemen, coming up, cut short the discussion.

In the solitude of her chamber, Dolly that night took her heart and mind to pieces, and diligently perquisited all their workings, pried into motives, dissected sensations, and probed like any surgeon. She wanted replies to two questions: first, why she was unnaturally indifferent to kisses; second, whether she preferred Lucian de Saumarez or Noel Farquhar. Her analysis left her little the wiser; she got few facts, because there were few to get. As Bernard would have accepted a kiss with unaffected composure, so Dolly in the same spirit could not understand the pother made about the matter; she was gifted with a masculine indifference, or, as Angela Laurenson would have phrased it, with no feminine modesty. Yet, when she turned to the second question, the thought of loving either suitor sent Dolly flying to unapproachable snow-peaks of virgin coldness, where the foot of no man ever had trodden or ever would tread. Dolly married, loving and beloved, the mother of half a dozen children, would still have kept in her heart a shrine of vestal purity. Careless about the borders of her kingdom she might be, but the citadel was inviolable. She came out of her

quest little the wiser, but with her mind made up.

She turned on her pillow and slept soundly, till the dawn, blossoming like a golden rose between the clouds, shone in upon her lying between linen sheets which smelt of violets, with all her chestnut hair twisted into one thick plait. The light roused her, and she was up in a trice and splashing in her tub of rain-water; then dressing rapidly, rolling up her hair in a knot, fastening on her blue dress and her plain white apron: in twenty minutes she was ready. Down-stairs she went full ten minutes late, and annoyed with herself and consequently with Maggie, who had been late too—for no reason, as Dolly told her, severely. Dolly laid the table for breakfast, with a pot of wall-flowers in the middle; she fetched the coffee-pot, and put on the milk to boil in an enamelled saucepan, and refilled the shining kettle—all Dolly's pots and pans looked like silver. She sliced the bacon into the thinnest of thin rashers and set Maggie to fry it. Finally she went to the churn, where she should have been half an hour earlier, praying that the butter might come quickly. She stood at the open window; the sun looked across the sill; a brown bee hummed in, seeking the wall-flowers; the bacon sizzled, the churn gurgled, and Dolly frowned.

"Oo, miss," said Maggie, pausing with the frying-pan aslant—"Oo, miss, there's a gentleman coming down the drive!"

"Hold the frying-pan straight!" was Dolly's stern reply.

"Oo, miss," said the irrepressible one, staring, wide-eyed, "but he's coming to the window, and it's—"

"Go on with your work!" said Dolly, in such a tone that Maggie went on. A shadow fell across Dolly's hands.

"Good-morning, Sister Dolly," said Lucian de Saumarez, leaning his elbows on the sill.

"Don't call me that; I'm not a Roman Catholic," said Dolly, not too graciously.

"Nor I, praise the pigs!"

"Why, do you dislike them so?"

"I hate the doctrine of confession and the system of spiritual directors," said Lucian, with unusual emphasis. "I call it morally degrading—however, I didn't come here to talk theology. Is the agrarian barbarian anywhere about?"

"Bernard 'll be in to breakfast at half-past seven, if you mean him."

"Then I guess I'll wait. Hullo, Maggie; how's the headache?"

"Teethache, sir," said the delighted Maggie, dropping a courtesy. "They're nicely, thank you, sir."

"Maggie, go and dust the parlour; I'll see to the bacon," said Dolly. Maggie retired quite crestfallen and sad.

"Why did you send the child off? She wasn't doing any harm," said Lucian.

"I'll call her back and go myself, if you want to talk to her."

"I don't, I don't; you know I don't. But why are you so cross?"

"Because I was late," said Dolly, candidly, and laughed, and recovered her temper. "Why weren't you at the Mertons' last night? Mrs. Merton said she asked you."

"I was looking after old Farquhar; he's been seedy." Dolly's lip curled. "Fact, I assure you. He had a touch of fever the night before last, and raved about you like Old Boots."

"I should have thought that as a literary man you might find a better simile. I met a friend of yours there—Mr. Meryon."

"What? Gambling Meryon? You don't say!" exclaimed Lucian. "I'll look him up. I haven't seen him since he won sixteen thousand off me at a sitting. Lordy! what a getting down-stairs that was!"

"So he told me."

"Did you hear the whole thing?"

"Yes."

"What, about Marguerite?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" said Lucian, and whistled a few notes. "Well?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Dolly, conscious that his bright inquisitive eyes were studying her face.

"Does it make any difference?"

"No. Yes," said Dolly. "I am very, very sorry."

"If I'd thought you'd take it that way," said Lucian, swinging himself up to a seat on the sill, "I'd have given you the whole history myself, and made it most awfully pathetic. I bet Meryon didn't pile it on half strong enough."

"You're perfectly callous!"

"My dear good girl, it's nine years ago," said Lucian, "and there's no sentiment about me, at my age. Hullo! whom have we here?"

Dolly looked up from the churn and saw a stranger coming up the path. He was a young man of six or seven and twenty, tall, fair, slender, very good-looking, and most correctly dressed. At first glance Dolly saw a resemblance to her last night's acquaintance, Angela Laurenson. He had the same fair hair, the same dark-grey eyes, and the same delicate and colourless type of features, though his were more regular, his nose in particular being ac-

curately Greek; but the likeness appeared only in the outward mould, Angela's alertness being replaced by an air of languid tranquillity. He was carrying his bag and a gold-headed cane, and seemed to find the cane alone quite as much as he wished to support.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "could you direct me to The Hall?"

"Go back to our gates and turn to the right, straight on till you come to four cross-roads; take the left-hand road up the hill, and you will see The Hall on your right, a white house among fir-trees," said Dolly, who had the masculine power of concise explanation.

"About how far is it?"

"Two miles and a quarter."

"Thanks very much," said the stranger, with a resigned air, preparing to go.

"Been walking far?" inquired Lucian, who had not failed to notice the dust on his boots.

"From Wemborne. I missed my train and could get no cab," said the stranger, mentioning a junction twelve miles away.

"Why, man, you must be dog-tired! Have you had any breakfast?"

The stranger smiled and shook his head.

"We shall be very glad if you will come in and share ours. It is ready now," said Dolly, simply.

"Thanks very much. I am particularly grateful, but I'm afraid I can't wait."

"Have some cider; I can recommend it," said Lucian, hospitably.

"Or a glass of milk," suggested Dolly, maternally careful of his health.

"You are very good," said the stranger. "I am rather thirsty."

"You'll have some cider, then?"

"No, no cider, thanks. But I should very much like the milk."

Dolly went away to fetch it, and the stranger's eyes followed her with involuntary admiration.

"What a confounded nuisance these Wemborne trains are!" said Lucian, who knew the time-table considerably better than the porters at the station. "They leave you two minutes to catch your connection, and then make the main-line train half an hour late!"

"I could have caught mine," said the stranger, with the hint of a smile, "if I had chosen to run for it. But it was such a fag, you know."

"You like walking twelve miles better than running twelve yards?"

"I don't know that I put it to myself in that form," said the stranger; "but I own that I don't like hurrying. I could take my time over the twelve miles, you see."

"You've done it in pretty good time," said Lucian. "Three hours, or less."

"Nearer eight, I fancy."

"You came by the early train?"

"No, by the late."

"Ye towers o' Julia!" was Lucian's irrelevant comment on this admission.

"I have an idea that I got lost in the dark," explained the stranger. "I seemed to meet the same duck-pond several times. Thank you very much. I am immensely obliged to you." He took from Dolly's hand the warm and foaming milk, drank it, and went on his way, walking, as Lucian now noticed, slightly lame, but gracefully still, as he went up the steep, stony path. Dolly said, watching him with softened eyes, as she sometimes watched Lucian: "He looks tired to death. I am sure he is not strong."

"Maternal spirit! You were born to be a nurse, Dolly."

"No. I never want to nurse women or children, but I am sorry for men, especially when they are plucky, as he is. I wonder who he can be?"

"So do I," said Lucian. "I'd also like to know why he shied so violently at the notion of cider. I dare say we shall hear."

They left off talking by common consent.

The entrance of the stranger had checked and turned their thoughts, and, strangely enough, seemed to dislocate their simple and friendly relation. Dolly took out her butter, pulled down her sleeves, and turned her attention to the bacon. When she broke silence it was to speak of a fresh subject, one which she had not meant to broach that morning, though it had been on her mind since the night before.

"Mr. de Saumarez, will you take a message from me to Mr. Farquhar?"

"With all my heart, only I've a kind of idea that he'd rather you told him yourself."

"No, but I would not. I don't wish to see him again for the present. I don't wish to see him for three months."

"Three months!"

"Yes."

"That's a long time, Dolly."

"Not long for what I want to do."

"Make up your mind?"

"Yes."

"Can't see why you shouldn't do that now. Farquhar's what I should call eligible building-ground; you might erect a cathedral on him, or you might run up a slave-market; anyhow, he'll be what you make him, Dolly."

"I certainly sha'n't make anything of him if you go on praising him. You ought to

know that praise is the strongest of disqualifications"

"You're an unreasonable being. If you don't see him, how do you think you're going to know your own mind better three months hence than now?"

"I'm coming to that. I don't want to see him; but if he cares to write to me I'll answer his letters. That's what I want you to tell him."

"Glory!" said Lucian. "Then while he's away I'll walk in daily and praise him up to the skies. I think I read my title clear to a gay time."

"I want you to go, too," said Dolly.

"Me? Oh, I'm a harmless individual; you needn't do that."

"But I want to put you both on an equality and judge fairly."

"Ah, but you'll never marry me."

The sincerity of conviction was in Lucian's voice; Dolly had that one fleeting glimpse into his fundamental creed. While he lived he would never give up hope, but behind it he accepted the certainty that no hope of his would ever find fulfilment; such indelible characters had failure written upon his spirit. Dolly pitied him so much that she was almost ready to contradict his creed by the promise of her-

self. Almost, but not quite; the shadow of the change which she had felt that morning interfered to prevent her. Better to wait, she thought; better to deliberate and weigh, not act on the impulse of a mood. She did not speak, and Lucian's golden chance passed.

"I don't know whether I shall marry you or not," she said. "I'll write to you both; and at the end of the three months I'll let you know, if you still care. There's Bernard."

It was not Bernard, however; Bernard was very late that morning. For the space of half an hour those two, who felt that their interview should have been neatly rounded off by the entrance of a third person, were forced to make conversation in the regions of small talk. Real life is not often appropriate in its arrangement of incidents. Eight o'clock struck before Bernard walked in, large and calm and hungry. Lucian disburdened himself of his message, which was merely an invitation to play billiards.

"I guess Farquhar must be pretty sick of teaching me," said Bernard, cutting himself a round off the loaf; after which he supplied Dolly's needs. "But I suppose he knows his own business best. I say, did you see that girl who took me in to supper last night?"

"Dinner, Bernard."

"Dinner, then. Did you see her?"

"Yes, I did."

"Who was she?" asked Lucian.

"Miss Angela Laurenson."

"Pretty girl, very smart, woman's rights, little aristocrat; yes, I know. Go ahead, Colossus; what about her?"

"I guess the dude who ran me down's her brother; I met him again this morning," said Bernard; "that's all."

"Oh, what was he like?"

"Weedy looking chap in gray, with a drawl and a carpet-bag."

"L. L. Laurenson, Esq., Royal Artillery, Distinguished Service Order," said Lucian. "I know him, too, by name; as you would if you'd ever talked to Angela Laurenson for two minutes on end. She can't keep him out of the conversation."

"Does she call him Lal?" Dolly asked, curiously. Lucian nodded.

"Well, I guess I talked to her for two hours on end," said Bernard, cutting himself another slice from the loaf; "but she didn't mention him."

"What did you talk about?"

"Me," said Bernard, "and her. Pass me a couple of eggs, will you, Dolly?"

# XI

## IN ARDEN

THE breast of a wooded hill, leaning towards water still as glass and green as malachite, confronted the Hôtel des Boërs, at Vresse-sur-Semois. Dark-green and silver, the valley lay below; a nightingale was singing in the dawn; and presently the gold eye of the sun, looking down through the high woods, shone on hills white with dew, spangling them with fiery drops, and changing into silver threads the little singing streams which tumbled down through bright-green dells to join the silent river. Mists cleared away like breath from a mirror, and there on the water a little lawny islet lay like an anchored dream; they had been cutting the hay, and from the grey swaths floated up the odours of Eden. Thus rose Lucian's first day in Arden, and he was up to see the dawn.

Farquhar had gone on some weeks before to complete his arrangements. Having been brought up by his Scotch relations near Aber-

deen, he knew a good deal about granite, and on his first visit of inspection had pointed out that in texture, grain, and colour the stone of the Petit-Fays quarry resembled the valuable red granite of Peterhead. The owner simply laughed him to scorn, and went about lauding his scrupulous honesty at the expense of his sense in a fashion which afforded a subtle gratification to the person praised. Nevertheless, Farquhar persisted in buying the quarry, and soon proved himself right. At once he brought over new, modern machinery, and sent for skilled workmen from England. His design was to supply the Belgian market, which had heretofore been satisfied with Scotch granite. Paving-stones, better finished than those turned out by the primitive quarries of the Meuse; polished shop-fronts for the new suburbs of Brussels, especially the splendid streets near the Boulevard d'Anspach: these he could tender at lower prices than the Scotch dealers, for in Belgium labour is cheap and the cost of transport light, especially on the state railways. For the present he retained his English workmen, with the intention of replacing them by Belgians so soon as they had learned the niceties of their trade; and for this purpose he had already formed classes for instruction in polishing and sculpture. His manager, an American

named Charlesworth, had the teaching of them, and Lucian had promised to give his services as well.

The quarry, which was already in full work, lay behind the bend of the Semois, just out of sight of the hotel. In Belgium one looks for the grubbily picturesque, for endless variations on the themes of dirt and art, rather than for the beauty of rock and wood and river; yet here in the south the streams run through the loneliest, loveliest valleys, abandoned to their kingfishers and great butterflies, and musical with little springs which run among the hills. The quarries are hardly eyesores. The approaches of Farquhar's were even picturesque; the intractable granite, interrupting with its fire-scarred shoulders the suave contour of the hills, had scattered rocks across the stream, which reared in a white ruff round each and raced away with plenty of noise and foam. The stately cliff which the quarrymen were labouring to destroy rose up behind from among trees. Lucian, who never loved his bed, by six o'clock had had his breakfast and was standing on the verge, looking down into the pit. It was unbeautiful; blackened like a hollow tooth by the smoke of the blasting, swarming with midget figures, the rocks fell away down to the depth, where the blocks of granite were be-

ing split up for convenience of loading. The graceful, deliberate crane let sink its trucks to be filled, and as slowly raised each to its appointed bourn; the noise of the steam crusher, where the chips were being ground to powder for cement, went on continuously; the boring-machine was also at work; and four or five men, splitting up a large block of granite, were playing "The Bluebells of Scotland" by striking on drills of different tones.

Presently the whistle of a siren silenced the music, and with one accord the quarrymen left their work and took shelter. Five minutes later, a detonation and strong reverberations shook the cliff; and when the smoke cleared, Lucian saw fresh boulders lying displaced from their bed, and a fresh scar graven upon the corrugated walls. So the work went on. Danger was always present; but the danger of the quarry is not like the loathsome sleuth-hound of disease which tracks down the potter and the worker in lead. It is a sudden and violent peril, which leaps out like a lion and strikes down its victim in the midst of life. Day by day the quarryman deliberately stakes against death the dearest of man's gifts; it is not surprising that for other stakes he is a gambler, too.

There was an accident even as Lucian watch-

ed. A young Belgian neglected to obey the warning of the siren, and was overtaken. After the fumes and smoke had cleared, his mates went down and found him lying unconscious, little injured, but stupefied by the poisonous gases which the explosion had set free. A crowd came together, Farquhar among them, barely distinguishable by the eye, though the tone of his voice came up with surprising clearness. The lad was carried away, and work went on again; but Lucian was now all on fire to join the toilers and take his share in their risks. Most excitable men fall disinterestedly in love with danger at least once in their lives; Lucian himself had done so before, and had stopped a mad dog scare by picking up in his arms the supposed terror, an extremely depressed but perfectly sane fox-terrier. For this piece of uncalculated bravado he had consistently and correctly disclaimed the title of heroism, of course in vain. He turned now and marched gaily down the path, with the intention of falling to work at once; but midway down he encountered Farquhar, with Charlesworth, the quarry-master, and was stopped for introduction.

Smith Charlesworth was a huge man who would have balanced Bernard Fane upon a see-saw; he dwarfed Farquhar's excellent pro-

portions. His bronzed countenance might have been hammered out of the granite which he surveyed, without any great skill on the part of the craftsman; but it inspired confidence. His slow, soft voice and deliberate movements built up the notion of strength; and Lucian had not heard him speak two sentences before he knew that he liked him. Here was a man whose calm courage was not at the mercy of his nerves; a man also of stern rectitude, by nature narrow, but broadened into tolerance by experience.

"Yes, it's a bad business about that young chap," he was saying: "but what can you expect? It was his own fault. They've got industry but no method. Here's Mr. Farquhar thinks they're going to turn out A1 copper-bottomed sculptors, but I guess he'll find his error. They haven't got it in 'em."

"Well, we've just got to put it in," said Farquhar, good-humouredly. He was on his best behaviour, saying not a word that was genuine, and consequently his conversation was dull.

"What do you think of the quarry?" Lucian asked.

"First rate." Charlesworth stepped to the edge of the pit and stood there calm as a rock, with the square toes of his big boots projecting

into the air. He pointed to the dark buttress behind which the boring-machine was at work. "See that? That's the finest sample I've seen out of Scotland. You mark my words; in five years you'll be sending shipments right out to the States, and they'll take all you've got and ask for more. Mr. Farquhar's begun the right way; he's put plenty money in the concern and he'll take plenty out — always providing we don't get sent to kingdom come first."

Farquhar laughed at this last idea, but Lucian asked an explanation. The American impressed him as a very careful speaker, not given to random words.

"Well," said Charlesworth, stroking his chin, "these chaps here don't take to your Britishers, and that's the bed-rock fact."

"What's going to happen, do you think?"

"I guess we shall be running into some dirt before long."

"Most pacific nation in the world, the Belgians," said Lucian, cheerfully. "Been fought over so many times that they haven't a ha'porth of kick left in them."

"Yes; good square fighting's not in their line. It's the stab in the dark they go in for," said the American, drily. "Two-thirds of the continental anarchists hail from Brussels. I've run Dutchmen and I've run Kanakas, and I guess

I can make out to put up with these stiff-necked Britishers of yours; but the Belgian mongrels are enough to make an oyster sick. However, the crew's not my affair; and if Mr. Farquhar's satisfied, why, so am I. And I hope I may be wrong."

Charlesworth was no croaker; having given his warning he left the matter, and they went down into the quarry talking of possibilities rather than of presentiments. Lucian could not see the grounds of his forebodings; the men seemed friendly, both with the manager and between themselves, and they were certainly all that is gracious to him personally. Lucian thought in French when he spoke to a Frenchman.

They stayed all day at the quarry, taking lunch in the engine-room on slim little sausages and beer. Later on, Lucian assisted at the modelling class, acting as interpreter for Charlesworth, who could not always find the right technical terms. He was a strict master, extreme to mark what was done amiss. "I've no opinion of soft jobs," he said to Lucian, who had stood listening to what seemed a very harsh rebuke for a very small fault on the part of an elderly English workman who had taken Lucian's fancy. "Keep them up to the mark, that's my motto. I never will tolerate scamp-

ing. Give me good work and I'll give you good wages; but if a man don't handle the tools the way he ought, why, he can go! and good riddance, say I."

"That's all right for you, with your confounded meticulous correctitude and exactitude, my friend," said Lucian, still vicariously sore; "but how would you feel if you knew that the worst work they put in was head and shoulders better than the best work you put in?"

"I guess I should turn to and take a hand at something I could do."

"And suppose you were incompetent all round?"

Charlesworth turned and looked at him. Lucian, laughing, appeared hardened and insouciant, but the American was slow to judge. "Well, I don't say I'm right," he said; "and I don't say you're wrong. But I couldn't do with your way, and I guess you couldn't do with mine."

"There are nine-and-sixty ways of constructing tribal lays, and every single one of them is right," quoted Lucian, coughing.

"You toddle home; the siren will go in half an hour, and this air's bad for your cough," said Farquhar, coming up and putting his hand on Lucian's shoulder.

"Shut up, you prophet! you thing of evil! I haven't coughed once this day."

"There you err; I've heard you twice, myself."

"Well, that isn't once, is it?"

They laughed, and Farquhar shook him by the shoulder, apostrophizing him as a fool. "It's reeking damp here by the water; you'll be laid up if you aren't careful."

"You want me to see your dinner's ready, that's what it is," said Lucian, going. Charlesworth looked at Farquhar. "Sick?" he asked, with a backward nod.

"No constitution at all."

"I should put a bullet through my head if it was me," said Charlesworth, briefly. "This world's not made for incompetents." But, luckily for the peace of the quarry, Farquhar did not hear what he said.

Lucian went to the Hôtel des Boërs and flirted with Laurette, the charmingly pretty maid, as he smoked on the veranda. He shared Dolly's opinion that a kiss or two did not matter to any one, and he carried his views into practice, which she did not. This was not heroic, but Lucian had many commonplace failings which disqualified him for the post of hero. He was still living at Farquhar's expense; he had brought into this present under-

taking nothing but his knowledge of modelling. Yet he accepted his position and was in the main content. The timely sale of a couple of short stories had permitted him to buy the clothes which he was wearing and to pay his journey over, otherwise he would have euphemistically borrowed from Farquhar. Little debts such as that galled him; but the main burden sat lightly on his shoulders, which was well; for, as he told himself with obstinate pride when visited by the pricks of self-contempt, he had consistently done his best and had failed not through his own fault.

The evening set the pattern of many evenings following. Charlesworth came in with Farquhar to dinner; he had been lodging at Petit-Fays, but now talked of transferring himself to the hotel, which, though as primitive as the pious farmers whose name it bore, was certainly cleaner than they. The dinner made Farquhar sigh for the flesh-pots of England; he permitted himself to be a bon-vivant, to tone down his excessive virtues. Sorrel soup, beefsteak which never grew on an ox, tongue stewed with cherries, and a *baba* made by the eldest son of the house, who was a pâtissier; this was the menu. Now a *baba* is a kind of sponge-cake soaked in rum and sweet as saccharine: Charlesworth would not touch it,

Farquhar ate a morsel and did not want any more, but Lucian, with the whimsical appetite of an invalid, was only deterred from clearing the dish by Farquhar's solemn assurance that it would make him tipsy. Such was their meal, finished off by a cup of excellently strong black coffee, which they drank on the veranda as they smoked and talked. The night was dark, still, and starry; the huge, soft, shadowy hills shut out all wandering airs, and the river passed them silent, gleamless. But close beside them a wooden trough guided down the water of a spring which rose among the moss of the steep hill-orchard, and the loquacious little fount made an irregular sibilant accompaniment for their voices. Laurette's young brothers, shy but friendly, hovered round the door listening to the strange foreign talking, anxious only to be allowed to be useful. The Ardennois are hospitable folk.

Farquhar was thinking of building a small house; he had interviewed a local architect, who proffered him weird designs for a maisonette after the style of the Albert Memorial, with multitudinous tourelles and pinnacles picked out in red and white and blue, and liberally gilded. Refusing this gorgeous domicile, he was beset with advice from Lucian and from Charlesworth, each of whom professed to know

something about architecture; though Lucian's counsels recalled the wise saw that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, especially in ceilings, and seemed likely to afford a modern instance of a castle in the air. The talk became more personal. They were all travellers: Lucian the most inveterate, for he had wandered the world across. Farquhar could speak familiarly of Africa; Charlesworth of the States and the South Seas, where for several years he had traded with a schooner of his own, until a drunken pilot kept Christmas by sinking her off Butaritari, in the Gilberts. Charlesworth's voice softened when he spoke of the Islands, which had set their spell upon him; but there was little softness in it when he mentioned that pilot. His talk was deeply coloured by the sea, but he had when he chose the address of a gentleman. He was married, he said: had married a clever Boston girl, grown tired of high culture, who sailed with him till the *Golden Horn* met her watery fate, and who was now teaching school in California at a salary of two hundred dollars a month. She put by every cent she could spare, and he was doing the same, until they had saved enough to return to the South Seas. "For," said Charlesworth, "there's nothing draws you like the Islands."

"Islands have a special fascination, I suppose," said Lucian, thinking of Guernsey.

"Yes, it's right enough out here, but England's the place for me," said Farquhar, pushing back his chair. "Come to bed, De Saumarez; it's time for all good little boys to turn in."

Lucian settled back into his seat. "Go away: I won't be mussed up! I believe you're simply thirsting to flesh your clinical on me."

"Not I. I've done enough nursing since December to last me my life."

"Very good for you," said Lucian, lighting a fresh cigar.

Farquhar watched his chance and snatched it. Lucian was up in a moment, and there was a scrimmage in which he did not conquer; whereupon he lifted up his voice and wailed aloud, to the amazement of Charlesworth, who was not used to Lucian's ways. "I want my cigar!" was the burden of his complaint, repeated with variations.

"Go to bed and you shall have it," said Farquhar, laughing and wary.

"Never!"

"You're unreasonable. Why shouldn't you?"

"I'll be shot if I'll give in to an arrogant brute like you! Besides, I want to wait for the post."

"Oh, the post," said Farquhar, with a singular change of tone. He dropped the cigar and sat down. He did not look at Lucian, but Lucian shot a glance at him, and both were silent. Charlesworth stared. The constraint lasted for a moment. Then, pat to the occasion, Laurette came out with the letters. Farquhar half rose and put out his hand, but she passed him by for Lucian. "Pour monsieur." The amazed Charlesworth saw rapidly varying expressions flit over both faces: anger, jealousy, triumph, rancour: and then Laurette, after rubbing her hand clean on her skirt, turned and held out to Farquhar the exact facsimile of Lucian's small grey envelope. "Et pour monsieur, encore une."

Farquhar took his letter, and Charlesworth took himself home.

## XII

### AND WILT THOU LEAVE ME THUS?

THERE were eight young Laurensons, of whom the two youngest were Laurence Lionel, commonly known as Lal, and Angela. Angela was the only girl, and had been spoilt, or rather given her own way; but then, that way was always exemplary. She had done her best for all her brothers, she said, with pathos, yet Bertie still remained a dude and Harold still a fool, and with none of them had she succeeded save with Lal, who was a pattern of virtue. Angela bade him work for the army, enter Woolwich, and pass into the Royal Engineers; he obeyed her by coming out first in his batch. After this they had a slight difference of opinion, for Lal chose to enter the Royal Artillery and would not be dissuaded from it by all the accusations of laziness which his guardian angel hurled at his head. She did not know, and nobody else noticed, that a certain poor country parson's son, who after patient toil had attained only the eighteenth

place on the list, was by Lal's retirement elevated among the lucky seventeen to be drafted into the Engineers—the only regiment where a penniless man can live on his pay. Lal's choice remained a puzzle to Angela. But Lal was queer; she was sure that her deepest soundings never quite touched bottom.

Lal entered at once upon a distinguished career. During the South African war he was twice mentioned in despatches, received the Distinguished Service Order, and was never taken prisoner: three grand distinctions which made the guardian angel proudly preen her wings. She had cried herself to sleep every night of the first week after he sailed. In Somaliland he got enteric and was wounded in the foot; he was invalided home amid a blaze of glory with six months' sick leave and another medal to hang beside the two which a liberal Conservative War Office had already bestowed for his services in Africa. He sustained the character of wounded hero with fortitude, but without enjoyment: Lal was modest. Admiration silenced him; he had been more open with Bernard, a stranger who did not know him, than he had ever been with his sister. He made a vaguely impressive figure at Ella Merton's garden-parties: a quiet, languid, fair-haired young aristocrat, always very correctly dressed,

always courteous, always reticent. Maud Prideaux, who had names for everybody, hit off the Laurensons' peculiarities to a nicety when she christened Angela *On dit* and her brother *Cela va sans dire.*

Angela Laurenson had views; she had also a first-class dressmaker. These sentences are not gems from a German grammar, but the statement of correlated facts; the first would never have been in evidence but for the second. The temperance question, the rights of women, public scandals, and private fads were Angela's happy hunting-grounds. She was member of a dozen associations, and corresponded with a dozen wooden-headed boards. She had chased the Protestant donkey to his home in a mare's-nest. Sweeping into one condemnation offenders against manners and morals, she declined to know wicked noblemen, whitewashed ladies, grocery knights, and Chicago millionaires. In fact, her fair little thin face, her clear little imperious voice, her perfectly simple and simply perfect frocks were pretty widely known; and in spite of certain errors, she was respected.

In the fore-front of her battles she always posted Lal. He was not allowed to smoke. He would have been enrolled in the Ladies' League had that been possible. He was constrained to become what in temperance language

is called an abstainer: which was especially hard on Lal, who inherited a delicate critical taste in wines together with an ancestral cellar. But he disliked these things less than being dragged to meetings and forced to sing "Dare to be a Daniel" upon a platform. Lal hated publicity: not the lion, but the lookers-on, seemed to him the real test of Daniel's courage. If anything could have held him back from distinguishing himself in action, it would have been the fear of reward.

Now one day at lunch the story of Mrs. Searle and her copper came up, and was discussed in all its ramifications, down to the illness of Mrs. Searle's baby and Noel Farquhar's political prospects. Angela, who was present, took it into her pretty little head that duty called her to visit the sick child. Like most city-bred girls, she expected the country lanes to be haunted by drunken tramps, and was nervous of walking alone; but Maud Prideaux vowed that babies were beyond her charity, and Mrs. Merton, who was enthusiastically consulting planchette in a corner with a serious young man, professed a bad headache. Angela fell back on Lal; and, accordingly, at three o'clock they were walking towards Burnt House, Lal irreproachable in grey, with lilies in his button-hole; Angela, also

in grey, a demure little Quakeress. The sky was in grey as well, and mist clung to the face of the earth like fine grey powder, dulling all colours. The flattened uplands round the black cottages were as dingy as a suburban street on a wet day.

Mrs. Searle was at the new copper, trying to do the family wash; but between the naughtiness of Randolph, aged thirteen months, the frettiness of Florry, aged twenty days, and her own health, she had not done much. She was not at first very gracious; poor people have their feelings, and the attitude of Angela, with her skirts unconsciously held very high to avoid contamination, suggested the supercilious patronage of the lady bountiful. But Angela's kindness was too homely to remain hidden under a Paris hat; she soon received the story of Mrs. Searle's illness and the baby's delicacy: "but we're getting on nicely now," the girl added, leaning against the copper and holding the brickwork to keep herself steady, the lovely, pathetic brown eyes uncomplainingly lifted to Angela's. She said she had at first fed the baby on Brighton biscuit and boiled bread, beaten up in water.

"Brighton biscuit?" said Angela, doubtfully, looking, with no feeling but repulsion, at the purplish, spidery, open-mouthed creature

in its tumbled clothes. "Is that good for it, do you think?"

"Well, Miss Dolly she says give her milk and barley-water, but the milkman don't come up here. So I tried her with the condensed, and it's wonderful how she's got on since."

"I'll tell the milkman to bring you up a gallon a day,'" said Angela, with a small sigh relinquishing a silver blotting-book which she had coveted. "That will be enough for it, won't it?"

"Well, I'm sure you *are* kind—"

"And couldn't you get a woman in to help you? You're not fit to be doing your own work yet."

Then suddenly Mrs. Searle melted into tears, not for her own misfortunes, and poured forth the tale of her sister Hilda, who should have been her help, but had got into trouble. Not yet seventeen, very pretty, and now desperate, she was gone to a low public-house in Swanborough. "Mr. Searle he can't get her to come away, and I can't get so far, you see. And really, miss, some days I don't know how to crawl about, my back is that bad; only things has got to be done somehow. I did think Hilda would have kept straight. Or she might have stopped at home till my trouble was over.

I told her as nobody would think the worse of her if it was just once, as you may say, and she kept herself respectable after; but there, you never know how to have girls, and off she goes, as bold as brass, and me so ill I couldn't say nothing to her—"

Angela sighed impatiently; none of her pet reforms touched Mrs. Searle's case; no reforms ever do. The celebrated last words of the poor woman who always was tired, who lived in a house where help was not hired, represent the aspirations of most cottage mothers, night by night, until the children are grown old enough to help them. Angela did her best; she promised a nurse, and left a half-crown; and then walked out upon Dolly Fane, who was talking to Lal. They were standing so close to the door that Angela knew Lal must have overheard Mrs. Searle's story, and the colour came into her face as she took Dolly's hand. She forgot to be surprised to find them acquainted until Dolly in her direct fashion told her of their early meeting; when Angela did not forget to feel annoyed.

Nor was she better pleased when Dolly, entering the cottage, quieted Randolph and prescribed for the baby and put Mrs. Searle into a chair, proving herself efficient where Angela had just proved herself incapable. It

was all done in innocence, and innocent, too, was Dolly's laugh when she heard of the liberal provision of milk allotted for the baby, for Mrs. Searle had not mentioned the giver; nevertheless, Angela decided that she was not a nice companion for Lal.

"We shall be late for tea, Lal," she whispered, suggestively.

"Miss Fane will be ready directly."

"Not for half an hour or so; I am going to finish these things in the copper," said Dolly, appearing at the door in a large apron and with her sleeves rolled up. No inclement clouds could dim the brilliancy of her colouring; she was independent of sun and sky. But Angela became conscious that her own face looked drab, and that did not please her.

"If you don't mind walking home alone I think I'll stay and help Miss Fane; these cans are very heavy," said Lal, depriving Dolly of that she was carrying.

"I *do* mind walking home alone, across all those fields!"

"It really is not lonely, Angela."

"But there are bulls in them!"

"Oh no, Miss Laurenson, the cows have been driven home to be milked by now," said Dolly, serenely; "you need not be alarmed.

But I don't want any help; I hope Mr. Laurenson won't stay for me."

"I'll take you as far as the high-road, then, and come back," said Lal.

Dolly put up her eyebrows and laughed softly. "I'm perfectly competent to do the work myself; these cans weigh nothing." She held it out at arm's-length and lightly put it down, rising again elastic from the burden.

"You're accustomed to the work, of course," said Angela, dryly.

"I am; we do our own washing at home."

"If you want to be in by four, we had better start," Lal interposed.

"Good-bye," said Angela, not offering her hand; was not Dolly's wet?

"Pray don't come back, Mr. Laurenson; there are so many bad characters about the roads now; you might meet my brother Bernard!" Dolly retorted, with a faintly satirical accent.

"I certainly shall," said Lal, quietly.

Between Burnt House and the high-road Lal received a full-length portrait of his misconduct; he listened, as his habit was, in silence. Angela soon tired of reproving a dummy. "Why don't you say something?" she cried at last.

"What do you want me to say?"

"Do you mean to go back to that *girl?*"

"Certainly I do."

"O Lal!" said Angela. "Oh, do you really?"

"I can't leave her with that work on her hands."

"Yes, but—Lal, I don't like walking alone!"

"I'm sorry, Angela, but I promised."

"There's Mr. Fane," cried Angela, in a note of relief, and she hurried to meet him. Bernard in his working clothes was something of a shock to her nerves, but she got over it and gave him her hand.

"We've left your sister at the black cottages, Mr. Fane," she began, "and my brother wanted to go back and help her—"

"And my sister is a little nervous in these lanes," Lal continued, "so that if you would be so good as to see her as far as The Hall, I should be very grateful. It is on your way, I know."

'I'd like to very much," said Bernard, promptly.

"Thanks so much. Good-night."

He lifted his hat and walked off, leaving Angela speechless and ready to cry; for she had not desired Lal's presence with her so much as his absence from Dolly, and that Lal knew, and she knew that he knew. However, it was not easy to embarrass Bernard; he talked on

for both till she had recovered. "Ah," thought Angela, coming back to the remembrance of her escort, "here is some one who will not flout and contradict me and fling my own axioms in my face!"

"That chap Searle, now," Bernard was saying when next his word reached her brain: "he's a good worker; he might get on if he liked; but he will drink. Comes home every Saturday night drunk as a lord. What are you to do with a chap like him?"

"He should be persuaded to take the pledge," said Angela, reviving a little to discuss one of her favourite hobbies.

"Oh, the teetotal tomfoolery; no, I guess that wouldn't do for him. What he wants is to know when to pull up."

"Teetotal—nonsense?" said Angela, avoiding Bernard's too strong expression. "The pledge of abstinence is the only safeguard for an habitual drunkard. I am a total abstainer myself."

"Ah, but I guess you didn't ever drink," said Bernard, as one who scores a point. "Besides, girls don't want it so much; I daresay they can do without. But it stands to reason a man can't do a decent day's work on water. Spirits are no good; they're mostly adulterated with beastly stuff, and the best

of them isn't wholesome. But a glass of good, honest beer don't do anybody any harm. A couple of quarts a day, that's my limit; I dare say a quart and a half would do for a little chap like Searle, except, perhaps, in harvesting. The point is to know your limit and stick to it, and that he'll never do, more's the pity."

Angela felt the primitive truths of her life flying round her like slates in a gale. "But doctors say—" she was beginning.

"Doctors 'll say anything; and, come this time ten years, they'll all say all different. That old chap in Tennyson, now, who said he'd have his quart if he died for it; I guess he didn't lose much by sticking to his beer."

"Oh, do you read Tennyson?" said Angela, faintly.

"Sometimes, on Sunday afternoons. There isn't much to do on the farm, and there's no paper, and you can't read the Bible all day long; so when I've done my chapter I often turn in on him. I like the things in dialect; they're uncommonly good. I like the thing about the Baptists, who left their sins in the pond and poisoned the cow," he continued, with a grin. "Father lent 'em our pond once, when he'd had a split with the Wesleyans; but I guess they won't come there again to do their bap-

tising. It looks as clear as the river, but it's about six feet deep in mud."

"I was thinking of starting a branch of the C. E. T. S. here, and asking you to join it," said Angela, with the calmness of despair.

"Me turn teetotaller? I should die of it!"

"Your adherence would have strengthened my hands, but, of course, since you feel like this, there is no more to be said."

"Do *you* want me to join?"

"It does not matter. I sha'n't start the branch now."

Bernard walked on in silence. Six miles an hour was his usual rate of walking, four when with Dolly, or, as he supposed, with any other able-bodied female; but Angela was used to crowded London pavements and the very deliberate pace of lazy Lal. She did not protest, she was too much out of heart to mind being out of breath. She sadly supposed that Bernard was not observant. Great was her surprise when, remarking, "I guess we're going too fast," he reduced his pace to three miles an hour and rather doubtfully offered his arm.

"I suppose it's not the proper thing," was his comment when she declined it. "Dolly said so, but then she doesn't know everything; and you do take arms in to dinner. I'll remember

another time. Look here, are you set on this temperance business?"

"I think it a noble cause," said Angela, wearily standing to her guns.

"Then I'll take the pledge for a month."

"You will?"

"I guess I couldn't stand it any longer," Bernard explained; "but a month from now 'll just keep clear of the harvesting. I'd like to do what you want, as far as is reason. And here we are. I'm awfully glad to have met you. You'll remember I'd like to please you, won't you?"

Oh yes, Angela said, she would remember; and she kept her word, for all the night through she reflected alternately on Lal's defection and on Bernard Fane's subjection—a word which she refused to lengthen into subjugation.

Lal, on his way to the black cottages, walked really fast, but he did not get back in time to help Dolly with her cans of water; she was feeding the baby when he came up. Sitting in a low chair with the child on her knee, holding the bottle, the delicate little toy fingers clasped round her own, Dolly, intent and serious, was no Madonna of pity and love, but a business-like young woman performing a duty. But Lal, who was fond of little children, unconsciously ascribed to her his own feelings;

he saw the divine spirit of motherhood, and stood quietly watching, too reverent to speak and break the charm. It was the traitorous sun, suddenly bursting out to throw Lal's shadow on the floor, which made Dolly look up. She smiled. She had forgotten her vexation, and was frankly glad to see him, yet her first words were a reproach.

"Why did you come back? Your sister hated it, and there was no need!"

"I came to help you."

"It was a pity. Your sister is very fond of you, very proud; you should not vex her," Dolly said, laying the child in the cradle. She rose and came to the door, and stood in the hot sunshine, rich in colour as a Tintoretto, spiritual as the crowned Madonna of the angelical painter. She was still thinking of Mrs. Searle, and pity was Dolly's loveliest expression.

"I left my sister in the charge of your brother; he was going to see her home. Now will you accuse me of vexing her? Or are you going to give me something to do?"

"You may watch the baby while I sweep the room."

"Thank you; I will sweep the room while you watch the baby."

"You? You sweep?"

"Why not?"

"Have you ever swept in your life?"

"I have not; but I can try."

"Oh! very well," said Dolly, suddenly folding her hands and sitting down in her low chair. "Do it: there's the broom behind the door. Do it: I should love to see you."

The road outside was far cleaner than the floor of Mrs. Searle's kitchen. Lal stood, doubtfully surveying his task and the aged broom. "It really wants scrubbing," he said, seriously.

"Sweeping will do, if you sweep properly."

"'Will do!' Miss Fane, I am surprised to hear you use that sloven's expression. However, I am afraid sweeping will have to do, as we have neither sand nor Brooke's soap."

Leaving Dolly amazed at his erudition, Lal made a sudden descent upon the hearth-rug, shook it, rolled it up, and carried it out. He took out the cradle as well, very gently putting it down in the shade without waking the child. The chairs he piled on the table; the curtains he tucked up. Dolly took her place outside with the rest of the furniture, and stood in the doorway, watching and laughing. Lal paused, leaning on his broom in the middle of the floor as Maud Muller might have leaned upon her hay-rake.

Suddenly he made a triumphant pounce upon Mrs. Searle's brown teapot, which spent all its days upon the hob. He emptied away the liquid tea, shook out the leaves on a broken plate, and began to strew them with fastidious fingers about the floor: the contrast between him and his task was piquant. Bernard would never have attempted to sweep at all, Lucian might have tried, but he was not wise enough for the tea-leaf plan. Dolly's imagination could see him happily brooming all the dust out of the open door, and gathering it up with his fingers when it lodged in the inequalities of the flooring. This amateur house-maid worked in different style. Neat, deft, precise, that was Lal; he coaxed the flue out of the corners, he lifted the fender and swept underneath, he took away cobwebs from the window and spiders' nests from the angles of the ceiling, and swept all his gleanings into a symmetrical pile.

"A dust-pan, now," he said, looking round enquiringly.

"There's no such thing. Let me do it now: you've proved your powers."

"No," said Lal; "no." His eye rested on a copy of the local paper; in a trice he had it folded firmly with sharp edges, and was bending it into a convenient receptacle for the débris, which he emptied into the fire. Then he

dusted the furniture with his handkerchief and put everything back in place, twitching the ragged hearth-rug straight to the eighth of an inch and arranging all the chairs in pairs exactly.

"But it should have been scrubbed," he wound up, with a sigh of regret.

"I won't have it; Mrs. Searle wouldn't know her own room. Do you know, I never thought a man could have so—could be—"

"Could have so much sense," Lal finished, quaintly.

"Well, I didn't. Where did you learn how to do it?" said Dolly, laughing.

"Miss Fane, I have a pair of eyes, and our rooms at home are swept sometimes."

"Ah, but you've the hands, too."

"I know it," Lal said, displaying them with disgust. Dolly looked, with a wise little nod, and went into the scullery; she brought back a fresh towel, a piece of yellow soap, and a tin basin full of clean hot water.

"That is good," Lal said, plunging in his hands with an air of relief. Dolly was looking at her own. "I think I'll wash, too," she said; and without more ado stripped back her cuffs and slipped her fingers in beside Lal's. The sunlight sparkled in the water and flashed in silver circles, following the curve of the white

metal. Dolly chased the piece of soap all round the basin, and Lal captured it and gave it to her; her wrist was soft to the touch as a baby's. Lal was warmly alive to the charm of the moment, and would have prolonged it; not so Dolly. She withdrew her hands with the same indifference as though Bernard had been her partner. They were obliged to share the same towel; there were but two in Mrs. Searle's establishment.

"What a pussy-cat you are!" Dolly laughed, noticing Lal's fastidious movements. "Do you manicure your hands?"

"I rather think that is a deadly insult. No, I do not manicure my hands; I am merely clean."

"Merely clean! You're hard on the rest of us." Dolly was thinking of Lucian as he had appeared after half an hour of weeding in the violet-bed. She held out her own hand, soft, rosy, crinkled by the hot water. "There are stains on my fingers; I can't get them off without taking the skin, too; so I leave them on. Am I not clean, please?"

Lal was in danger of losing his head, and kissing the pretty palm that lay in his, "I don't see any stains," he said. Dolly withdrew it, colouring at his tone. She pulled down her sleeves, and told herself she was a fool to forget that men are fools.

"Do you always do as your sister tells you?" she asked, abruptly.

"Miss Fane, do you always do as your brother tells you?"

"I? Not often," Dolly frankly admitted. "I do as I like."

"You're more independent than I am: I do what Angela likes, except on serious and important questions of principle. It saves so much trouble, you know; I can do no wrong, like the king."

"What principle was involved in your staying this afternoon?"

Lal was dumb, manifestly embarrassed by this sudden attack.

"Tell me," Dolly insisted. She was expecting that he would answer "You," in which case she meant to snub him and give him up. But he remained silent.

"Why did you come back, when your sister hated it and you hated vexing her, as I know very well you did?"

"Because I couldn't stand seeing a girl carry those heavy cans."

Dolly had her answer now, and she knew it was the truth. Lal had coloured over his admission and cast down his eyes; he should have looked youthful and ingenuous, but he did not. A very expressive mouth had Lal;

the underlip was remarkably firm, pure, decisive; tenacity and independence controlled its curves. One might expect to find originality in his theory of life, anachronisms in his creed, possibly asceticism, certainly unworldliness: in fact, all those queer ideas whose existence Angela unhappily suspected. So much may be read in a momentary twist of the lips. Chivalry here in the twentieth century! Bernard looked on woman as an inferior animal, Lucian as a comrade, Farquhar as slave or sultana by turns: Dolly's observations and reflections were summed up in the involuntary remark:

"Mr. Laurenson, how very odd you are!"

# XIII

## THE FIRST DROPS OF THE THUNDER-SHOWER

*"O Medjé, who with thy smiling*
*Hast enchained my heart, once free—"*

GOUNOD, whose sweet and sensuous church music has something of the quality of *good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke*, has written some acceptable love-songs; such at least was Lucian's opinion. Aided by the night's stillness and the seductive influence of the stream which cradled their boat, Noel Farquhar's fine dramatic voice rang up the valley to the hotel, half a mile away. The twangs and pangs of Lucian's banjo did not travel so far. Farquhar had a powerful voice, thoroughly well trained; he did not tremble in sentimental passion and murder time in the name of liberty, nor yet did he alternately spue out his words and gobble them down. And he had fire; he could sing the very heart out of a song. His native taste in music he usually sacrificed to the general good; he would

sing "The Lost Chord" and "The Holy City" and "Beauty's Eyes," and other favourites, to please young ladies such as Angela Laurenson and elderly gentlemen who like a little music after dinner. But Lucian laid a taboo on these; he offered Farquhar the choice between what he called gamey music (meaning the glorious modern discords which we all delight to honour in the abstract) and ditties of the Bank Holiday school, with a chorus in which he expressed his desire to join. Whereupon Farquhar hurriedly embarked upon "Medjé."

It was a clear night of summer, still and starry. The stream's dark glass was filmed with silver mist which wavered and rose and receded as if it were the visible vesture of the wind; the smooth hills, spreading dark wings over the valley, breathed peace. For sounds they had the tinkle of the orchard runnel and the deep breaths of cows wrenching the dewy grass; and for scents the night perfume of the water and of the woods, as well as the sweeter individual smells of flowers: flaxen meadow-sweet, wild mint blowing purple among the reeds, and clover in the meadow-grasses.

"A summer night like this is the best imitation of Paradise this side of the Golden Gates," said Lucian, leaning down to watch the ripples parting silver-rimmed beneath the prow.

"I'd not give a cent to get into Paradise."

"You won't be asked, sonny."

"There you're right, for there's no such place."

"Your views on eschatology, my friend, appear demned definite."

"Definite? Finite, don't you mean?"

Lucian leaned back and folded his arms restfully; he liked nothing better than to explore the recesses of Farquhar's character, which were commonly open only after dark.

"Haven't you any intimations of immortality from the recollections of early childhood?" he asked.

"None," said Farquhar. "Never had. Seventy years of this world's long enough for me. I don't want an eternity to learn to be good in. Another point: if I believed what you Christians believe, do you think I'd live as you live? Not much. Act up to your creed; there's the secret of happiness."

"And what's your creed, then?"

"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," said Farquhar, cynically enjoying his own cynicism.

"And suppose the workings of Causation came and put a stopper on your eating and drinking? If you were brought to grinding poverty, say, or got infected with leprosy, or didn't marry Dolly Fane?"

"There's always the ultimate remedy," said Farquhar, with a shrug.

"Which means, being interpreted?"

"Suicide while of unsound mind: I'd take good care it wasn't called accidental death. I wonder, now, if they'd give me Christian burial?"

"Not if I was anywhere around, sonny; you may depend on that. So you seriously contemplate suicide as a possible end of your life?"

"Probable, not possible: I keep my revolver loaded. I've had that before me ever since I remember."

"Well, I'll give you the credit of being consistent; only, don't you include me among the Christians, for I'm not one. You can put down my inconsistencies to that if you like. If I'd owned a creed, I believe I might have stuck to it—tolerably well."

"You're sorry you've none?"

"Yes," said Lucian.

"The Almighty doesn't seem to know His own business very well."

"Don't you blaspheme," said Lucian. "I can't say I believe that there is a God, but I know I don't believe that there isn't. When little boys like you are profane, you make me think of some kids I knew, who had a mid-

night supper in the church-yard to show they weren't afraid of bogies. And it rained, and one got rheumatic fever; that was me," he wound up, cheerfully.

Farquhar laughed, and broke off to ask, "Is that any one calling?"

"Who'd look us up at this time of night, 'cept it was the postman?"

"Are you expecting a letter?"

"I had my weekly budget yesterday, and so did you, sonny; don't be jealous."

"I *am* jealous; I'm confoundedly jealous."

"What is it you want, boy?"

"To see your letter."

Lucian was fully alive to the fascination of playing with a tiger; he pulled out Dolly's grey envelope and played a tune on the back of it. "Here it is; what do you want to know?"

"I want to know how she addresses you and signs herself, and what the substance of it's like, and how many sheets she sends you."

"How many does she send you?"

"Curious, too, are you? Exchange, then."

"Not much. Suppose she called you darling and me only dear?"

"By Heaven, Lucian, I shouldn't wonder if I murdered you in my sleep some night!"

"Did you say in your sleep or in mine?" Lucian put in.

"I'd not do it in my senses, for I've no wish to be hanged for murder; but, I tell you, I can't get the thought of those letters of yours out of my head. And when the will's in abeyance the body sometimes works of itself. You keep your door locked: mind, I've warned you."

"Upon my solemn honour, old Farquhar, you are a savage!" exclaimed Lucian.

"Take the thing away, then; keep it out of my sight!"

"I guess you'd read it if you found it lying about?"

"You're right, I should. I'd have opened the envelope yesterday by the steam of the kettle, only Dolly 'd been at the pains to seal it, confound her!"

Lucian gave him a queer glance. That cynical confession did not alienate him; for one thing, he knew that it was necessary to make a large discount upon Farquhar's revelations of iniquity, and for another, had it been true to the last word it could not have changed his feeling. Strong, quiet, and immovable, that lay welded into his life; it almost equalled his love for Dolly; it outweighed his love for himself. He moved to give his letter to Farquhar, but checked his hand in mid-air; Dolly's affectionate words might so easily be misconstrued by a jealous

eye. Instead, he plunged the envelope over the side, and let it float away.

"There goes temptation," he said, as the chain of bubbles ended.

"There'll be others to come, though. There *is* some one calling."

It was Charlesworth hailing them from the shore; Farquhar took up the oars and rowed back. The huge figure of the American loomed up against the twilit sky, quiet as a rock; he never was impatient.

"Way up at the hotel I heard you singing, and I made out you must be down here, sir; higher up the water's not deep enough to drown a kitten," he said, as Farquhar secured the boat. A stake and a rope were all that was needed, without bars or locks; theft was unfashionable at Petit-Fays.

"Nothing wrong, is there?" Farquhar asked.

"I'd not go so far as to say that; but I told you we were running into some dirt, and it's come up pretty close."

"Ah! what's up, then?"

Charlesworth fell in beside him and told his tale. The path was narrow, the grass dewy, and the American had shown pretty plainly that he took his orders from one master only. Lucian dropped behind and meekly held his peace. It appeared that the lad who had been

injured was demanding compensation; Charlesworth, who was ready to give, had refused to concede; and a venomous little dispute had sprung up, which was breeding bad blood between him and the men. Added to this, they were asking higher wages.

"I couldn't put up with him, and that's the square truth," Charlesworth frankly acknowledged. "If he'd come to me and said, 'I was knocked silly, and I've lost a couple of weeks; I know I'd no business to be where I was, and I deserved all I got, but can you do anything for me?'—then I don't say but what I might have turned to and helped him out; that's talking. But when he swaggers up and says, 'Show us the colour of your money and be hanged to you, else I'll make you,' why, then I tell him that he's at liberty to go to Hades if he likes, but not a red cent shall he get from me. I don't know whether that's your way of doing business, sir, but I guess it's mine."

"My dear fellow, I'd not have you back down, don't think it! I've a preference myself for fighting things out. When was this?"

Farquhar's words were exemplary, but his face was less discreet; it was manifest that he did prefer to fight things out, and Charlesworth, who laid no claim to the Christian grace of meekness, hailed a spirit akin.

"This evening, after pay-time. I came right round to you."

"What's the next move to be?"

"Well," said Charlesworth, deliberately: "I guess it's me they've got a down on now; but when the time comes they won't stop to sort us out. They're pretty sick about your new-fangled machinery for one thing, and then there's the business about the Britishers: taking one thing with another, and this compensation racket on the top, you may bet they're sure-enough mad. And I've no use for a funeral at present. So before we go any further, sir, I'd ask you to come round to the works; for there's a job there I'd like you to see."

He would not explain any further, and the trio walked on past the gold-litten windows of the hotel towards the quarry. All was silent there and dark save for the signal-lamp of the watchman, sparkling on the brow of the pit among the constellations high in the dark sky, like a topaz among diamonds. Picking their way among the truck lines, which converged like so many silver cords from all directions towards the mouth of the quarry, they came up to the splendid block of granite marked out by Charlesworth for their first serious essay in carving. Its rich, even colour

and fine-grained texture made it very valuable. A pillar hewn from it, overrun by curly-tailed dragons and roses of strange design, was assigned to stand in a temple of the Flowery Land. Another part was to misrepresent the king in the market-place of a country town; and they had accepted other orders as well, for the whole mass weighed some thousands of tons. Upon the fulfilment of these conditions the future of the quarry depended. For three weeks past they had been hard at work loosening the granite from its bed and getting it free from the other blocks which wedged it in: an operation involving nice calculation and accurate obedience. Under Charlesworth's directions, shot-holes three feet deep and six inches apart were bored along the line of cleavage, cleaned out, charged with a cartridge, and filled up or tamped with clay. With each cartridge a length of slow fuse was connected, the different strands being gathered together in a metal case called the igniter, so that the cartridges could be fired simultaneously. Some use electricity to explode the charge, Charlesworth did not. The operator, generally himself, had to betake himself nimbly out of the way while the fuse burned on at three feet per minute till it came to the cartridge and finished its work. Already several small blasts had

taken place, preparatory to the large final explosion which was to dissever the whole block from its bed.

"I guess *that's* what they've got their eye on," said Charlesworth, coming to a stand in front of the cliff.

Farquhar thrust his hands into his pockets and said nothing.

"Dmitri Dmitriyevitch vows to be avenged of his enemies," suggested Lucian at his ear.

"What's that?—Shut up, De Saumarez, I'm doing a little thinking. So you think they mean to spoil the stone, eh, Charlesworth?"

"I guess they mean to," said the American, austerely, "but I guess I don't mean them to."

"Well, yes, I guess the same; but how do you think they'd set about it?"

"Tamper with the cartridges. Overcharge them, I'd bet: smash the whole place up, so's you couldn't cut a lady's paper-weight out of the bits. And if we went up along with it I guess they wouldn't go into mourning. That's the kind of crowd they are: measly little city-bred slushes who'll do anything so long as they can keep their own skins whole."

"I don't want to lose my granite, and still less to lose my life," said Farquhar. "How do you propose to circumvent them?"

"Well, there's three of us, sir; I reckon we

should be able to keep things straight. I dare say you know the difference between a one-pound charge and a two-pound, and I know I do, and so does Mr. de Saumarez here. What we shall have to do is to watch. There's a matter of a couple more blasts to run, besides the last. It 'll mean testing every charge every time; but that's how I made out we'd do it. Or, of course, if you like it better, we could cave in, and give the little beggar his solatium, and raise the men; that'd quiet them for a bit, and then I dare say they'd let us get this job through and we could fight it out after, when we don't stand to lose so much. I'm not boss here; it's for you to choose, sir."

"What do you say, De Saumarez?"

"What the dickens is the use of me saying anything, when you've already made up your mind like unto the solid earth that cannot be moved?"

"Well, I think we'll fight it out, then," said Farquhar, with a laugh.

"Fight goes," concluded Charlesworth.

And they went back to the hotel.

# XIV

## SMALL BEER

A WHITE cloth, white lilies and scarlet geraniums, red-tiled floor, flax-blue china: the low sun of evening painted their colours afresh; the lily petals glistened and sparkled like frosty snow. All the windows were open, and the soft little wind that stirred the straight muslin curtains filled the empty room with the scent of unseen pinks. Then came in Dolly, carrying a squat rounded jug of brown earthenware smoothly overlaid in silver; the spot of light dancing inside showed that the jug was full. She set it down by the wooden elbow-chair at the table's foot, put straight a sprig of parsley on the dish of cold meat, glanced at the clock, which said five minutes to seven, and then sat down, half in sunshine and half in shade, with her hands in her lap. For no longer than a minute was she idle; a book lay open on the table, its leaves ruffling and flying over and over, and she pulled it across and began to read at haphazard, as one visiting

an old friend. For between those covers her old friends dwelt in an army, and Dolly's favourite was named Jonis d'Artagnan. Since the age of seven she had read Dumas in his native tongue. Her brow was clear, her breath was even, she only moved to turn her page; tranquillity was Dolly's dower, bestowed on her by perfect health and peaceful nerves.

At seven o'clock Bernard came in, and Dolly quitted the oak of Fontainebleau to make the tea. "Have you washed your hands?" was her greeting, for Bernard was not as careful about such things as he might have been. Bernard answered: "Yes."

"Had a good day?"

"Pretty fair."

Standing before the tray, Dolly put a piece of sugar into her cup, then some milk, then some cream, and, lastly, the clear, auburn, aromatic tea. Authorities agree that this is the only correct method of tea-making, but Dolly kept their laws without knowing them. Bernard tilted up the silver jug and looked inside, and glanced across at his sister. "Have you got another cup?" he inquired. "I guess I'll have tea to-night."

"*Tea*, Bernard?"

"Isn't there enough to go round?"

"Oh! plenty," said Dolly. "Aren't you well?"

"I'm off beer for the present; that's all."

"It's quite good; I tasted some when I drew it," said Dolly, after a pause.

"Dare say," said Bernard, regarding the silver jug as though he thought the beer very good indeed, "but I don't want it to-day. Are you going to give me some tea?"

Dolly made a step towards the cupboard, checked herself, and sat down. "You'd better fetch the cup yourself; it's the proper thing for you to wait on me."

"I don't see why we should always be on our best behaviour here at home," observed Bernard, as, in complying, he knocked over the sugar basin.

"Because if you don't practise at home you go wrong when you are out. You pushed past me on Sunday as we came out of church."

The charge being true, Bernard felt annoyed. He essayed to drink his tea, pursed up his lips, and put down the cup in a hurry.

"If you won't drink the beer, I will; it would be a pity to waste it," said Dolly, who was watching him.

"You'd get tipsy if you drank all that."

"I was not proposing to drink all that; I could not do it if I tried. I cannot understand how men can dispose of so much."

"Girls don't work like men do."

"It's a good thing you are giving it up, then; I've noticed that you were beginning to get stout."

Bernard continued to look stolid. Out of patience, Dolly launched at him a sudden question.

"Are you turning teetotaller to please Miss Laurenson?"

"I'm not turning teetotaller. I'm only trying it for a time."

"But is it to please Miss Laurenson?"

"Well, yes; I guess it is."

"Not really, Bernard?" asked Dolly, with a change of tone.

"Why not?"

"She isn't your sort. And you've only known her for six weeks."

"Come to think of it, I wouldn't say the dude is your sort; but you seem to like talking to him."

"Bernard, do you want to marry her?" asked Dolly, after a pregnant pause.

"I'm going to."

"Hasn't it occurred to you that she may have something to say about that?"

"I dare say she'll refuse me, but if she does I can ask her again."

"And if she refuses you again?"

"Then I'll go on asking till she accepts."

"In fact, if you persevere you think she is bound to give in?"

"Girls generally do."

"Do they? I shouldn't."

"You aren't like most girls. You've been brought up with men."

"But, Bernard, Miss Laurenson is an heiress; she has eight hundred a year of her own, and more to come. Mrs. Merton told me so."

"Has she? Well, eight hundred a year 'll come in handy; I'm glad to hear it. If it's true, that is."

"And she is very pretty, and she dresses well, and her family is unexceptionable," pursued Dolly. "I expect she could marry a peer if she liked, or at any rate a courtesy title."

"Yes, but all those titled chaps are pretty rotten," said Bernard, cheerfully damning the aristocracy in a lump. "She'd do a sight better to take me. I'm pretty strong and free from vice, and sound in wind and limb; and as for family, I guess ours is good enough for anybody, isn't it?"

Dolly was reduced to silence, but she was so completely preoccupied that she poured cream and sugar into Bernard's cup and filled it up with beer, producing a mixture which he denounced in emphatic language and emptied

out of the window. Presently she interrupted his talk about the farm by asking:

"Bernard, are you fond of her?"

"She's getting a bit long in the tooth, it's true, but she's a pretty creature still. I guess she suits me as well as any," was the surprising answer.

"I mean Miss Laurenson."

"Oh, I thought you were talking about old Empress; I was."

"Are you fond of her?"

"Yes," said Bernard, composedly. "I am."

Dolly shrugged her shoulders. "I hope it will turn out well."

"Hope so, too," said Bernard. "She ought to take me simply out of gratitude. Anything more beastly than tea with this cold beef I never did taste!"

On the morrow, while Dolly was sweeping her room out, Maggie came up, gasping, to announce "Miss Lawson"; she had a happy knack of confounding names. It was, in truth, Angela, driven up by the pair of donkeys, as Ella Merton said, though only one was in the shafts. Mrs. Merton herself would not come in, because, she declared, Jehoshaphat would eat the reins if he were left. Jehoshaphat had a satanic temper and was more completely

omnivorous than an ostrich; beside devouring reins and boots and tin-tacks, he had a craving for any human flesh except that of his mistress, an exception which Ella triumphantly adduced in support of her self-bestowed name, since, said she, dog doesn't eat dog.

Therefore Angela was alone in the parlour when Dolly came down, rather hot, in a faded old dress: Angela, very cool and dainty in white muslin, now feeling that the advantage of appearance had fallen to her. Yet, in spite of her dress and her daintiness, she was still like a delicate sketch by the side of a beautiful painting.

"I'm sorry Mr. Fane isn't in," she began, rather stiffly. Angela could not approve of Dolly, and would not pretend that she did.

"The regret will be all on his side. Won't you sit down?" quoth Dolly, very polite.

"I'm afraid I can't stay, I am keeping Mrs. Merton. May I leave a message for him?"

"I shall be charmed to deliver it," Dolly assured her; and Angela sought consolation by mentally dubbing her accent provincial. Dolly exasperated her to such an extent that she was ready to imagine a Kentish twang in Miss Fane's foreign intonation.

"I believe Mr. Fane is interested in tem-

perance reform''—here Dolly smiled—"and I thought under the circumstances he might care to attend the great unsectarian conference which is to be held at Swanborough next week. I dare say you have heard of it."

"No; we have severed our connection with the chapel."

"This meeting is undenominational."

"Essence of chapel, isn't that? Or so I have always understood."

"Perhaps you will tell your brother that it begins at three o'clock," Angela trusted herself to say.

"I am sure Bernard will be delighted to go. Of course, he might speak himself almost as a reformed drunkard."

"Mr. Fane?"

"You converted him, did you not?"

"I converted him? From what?"

"Oh! from his habit of drinking beer. I am so glad; I have often told him that he took too much."

"Really, Miss Fane?" said Angela, in accents of serious concern. "I had no idea of it! What a shocking thing! I am indeed thankful that I have been instrumental in helping him to reform."

Dolly's lips twitched, but she instantly followed Angela's lead. "Of course it was not

yet very serious, and he did not often—well—exceed. But I assure you I am most grateful for all you have done; you have a wonderful influence over him—truly wonderful!"

"Then I shall hope to see him at Swanborough; and perhaps you will come, too? You need not feel embarrassed; there will be plenty of girls of your own age to keep you in countenance," said Angela, pleasantly.

"Thank you so much," said Dolly, as she opened the front door.

She stood on the step to speed the parting guests. When the last flicker of Angela's white parasol had vanished, she remarked to herself: "Certainly Bernard has a better right to trust his own judgment than any one I know!"

Both she and Bernard went to Swanborough for the meeting. They drove; and, after putting up the horse, had the satisfaction of encountering Miss Laurenson and her brother outside the station. Bernard went straight to Angela's side, and Dolly found herself walking with Mr. Laurenson. Lal was no talker; and as the uncivilized Dolly had not yet learned to speak when she did not want to, they walked on in silence.

Swanborough was a town of twenty thousand people, mostly wicked. Standing on a tidal

river, it harboured the vessels of all nations and the peculiar vices of each; there were, besides, barracks in the town, which brought their special dangers. High wages and a high standard of living prevailed: the head of one family would be calling for green peas in April, while the head of another, discharged from the same position, perhaps for drunkenness, would send his children, filthy, barefoot, and famishing, into the street to beg. That popular vice, drunkenness, flourished like a green bay-tree. A public-house blossomed at every street's corner, and its devotees lounged in its shade with their hands in their holey pockets. Passing one such palace as a youth pushed open the door, Dolly had a view of the crowded bar, and breathed in a puff of hot vapour wherein the scents of tobacco and gin and old clothes contended for the mastery.

"There are too many of those places!" she exclaimed, averting her offended face.

"There are," Lal answered her, rather bitterly.

"I cannot see why the licenses are renewed."

"Can you not? Every English government lives by this traffic; do you expect pious sons to commit parricide?"

"You feel very strongly about it," said Dolly, wondering.

"I see the results of the present system."

"Then do you believe in Prohibition or in Local Option?"

"I? I believe in putting the whole trade under public control, in reducing the number of licenses, and in giving the publicans a fixed salary independent of the number of men they turn into drunkards."

"But those are not Miss Laurenson's views, surely?" asked Dolly, somewhat taken aback. Lal was already repenting of his candour.

"It's one of the questions of principle on which we differ," he said, in his soft, lazy voice. "Don't betray me, Miss Fane; it will be time for me to reveal my heresies when Prohibition comes down out of the clouds. Angela herself is not where her theories are; she does plenty of practical hard work."

"Mr. Laurenson, what practical hard work do you do?"

"I?"

"You. I know you do something."

"Who told you anything about me?"

"No one. I gathered it from the way you speak."

"Oh, I see." Lal was unmistakably relieved.

"I wish you would tell me how you set about it."

"I'd rather not discuss the question."

"I beg your pardon," said Dolly. Twice, now, had he shut up like an oyster and pinched her fingers; and she was half angry, until she recognised that he meant no rudeness. To this conclusion was she brought by the study of his face. Lal, when he spoke of himself, had a trick of drooping his eyelids, so that, as the lashes were long, his eyes were hidden completely; he was foolish enough to be modest. The compression of his sensitive lips notified Dolly of another extenuating circumstance: namely, that he was uncomfortable to the point of frenzy. In escaping her inquiries he was ready to leap clear over the bars of politeness; surely, then, since he so valorously defended their privacy, his convictions must be very dear to him. As she was musing thus, the drooped lids were raised with disconcerting abruptness, and Lal's beautiful dark-grey eyes looked down appealingly.

"I did not mean to be rude. I would rather be rude to any one than you," he said.

Dolly's breathing quickened; a warm spring rose in her heart. "I had no business to ask you; but I thought perhaps I might do something myself," she said.

"It is only that I—" Here Lal stopped. "I don't think—" he began again; and finally

clothed his thought in a general law, altogether eliminating the painful personal pronoun *I*. "An amateur's private opinion is never very interesting."

"And you would rather not talk about your private opinions."

"I'm not very good at it," Lal admitted. "In fact, I generally make a fool of myself when I try—as on the present occasion." The victim of aphasia had put off his apology until they were close to the hall, and further conversation was stopped by their arrival at the door.

"You're coming in?" said Dolly, as he paused.

He shook his head.

"Don't you approve of *this?*"

"I'm afraid I don't like religion when it's vulgar," said Lal. He raised his hat and walked off down the street, and Dolly and her friends went in.

No cause needs salvation from its friends as does this of temperance. Intolerance, exaggeration, bad logic, bad taste, and bad grammar have all supported and do support it still, estranging men who would be content to work with the reformers if they took their stand on the noble charter given them by St. Paul: "*If meat make my brother to offend, I will*

*eat no flesh while the world standeth.*" At Swanborough there were two evangelists, whose names appeared on the programme as Rev. Dr. Brown and Rev. S. Jones, for your true temperance evangelist eschews the adjective *the* as rigidly as temperance in his speeches. The one spoke on "Gospel Dynamics"; the other proved the Bible a total-abstinence book and, incidentally, himself no orator. Angela found it hard to feel pleased; she looked at Bernard, and saw him yawning undisguisedly, and then at Dolly, who sat with hands folded, inattentive but composed.

And Dolly was composed, though she was conscious of a strange exaltation which rosed her cheek and set her heart throbbing and pulses beating in time with it in every finger. A well-spring of soft warmth suffused her frame; she shut her eyes and saw visions, she who was no dreamer — visions in which one figure alone was constant. She owned the truth. "I love him," she told herself. Shame she did not feel; she believed that Lal loved her back, and even if he did not there was no humiliation, since her gift was voluntary, since she was proud of her love. He won her by being better than herself. Dolly was a little pagan; her love was wild as a bird; but in it ran a puritan strain which claimed an answering

purity in the man she loved. Irreproachable though he was, Noel Farquhar could not give her that, nor yet could Lucian, though he was nearer to her ideal. But in Dolly's room at home she had an engraving of Watts's fine picture of Sir Galahad; and the artist might have drawn his young knight's face from Lal as he looked on a Sunday morning in church, when he sat in his corner behind a pillar which hid him from sight, as he thought. Had he known that Dolly had a clear though narrow view of his profile against the black marble of a mural tablet, it would have made him retrospectively very unhappy.

Love left Dolly the same girl as before, save that it illumined a side of her nature which had been hidden, as the sunlight, creeping across from the first faint rim of the crescent, slowly enlightens the disk of the moon. True, she now felt quite charitable towards Angela; but Angela was Lal's sister. She was also more lenient to the ungrammatical orators on the platform; for the excellent reason that she did not listen to them. These were accidents of circumstance. But when a stout lady in front ecstatically planted the hind-leg of her chair upon Dolly's instep and sat heavily down, the ennobling power of love did not hold her back from feeling annoyed.

When they came out Dolly listened to a discussion of the meeting, and herself added her word with moderate indifference. They walked together to the station, but Dolly, whose mood was dreamy, soft, and languorous, dissociated herself from the others and walked alone. As she passed the Sailors' Arms, which seemed a popular hostelry, the door again stood open, and again Dolly glanced in, and again saw the crowded bar; but this time Sir Galahad was leaning across the counter conversing with the bar-maid.

## XV

### COLLOQUIES WITH AN OUTSIDER

DOLLY did her best to get Bernard away from the station before Lal came up; but as she had only that morning been preaching the duties of man to unprotected females, and as Bernard's desires went wholly along with his duty, she could not detach him from Angela. She went away herself, on the pretext of ordering the dog-cart, met Lal in the station yard, looked full in his face, and refused to know him.

Angela was waiting impatiently; Lal had promised to meet her at six o'clock, their train went at six-fifteen, and it was now five minutes past. Lal was always exact in keeping his engagements. Angela felt uneasy, and was cross. Bernard stayed with her till ten minutes after the hour, and then hurried off to consult his sister. Dolly was quite ready to drive back alone; perhaps because the route through Hungrygut Bottom was in her mind

as the best way home, and to it Bernard might have demurred on the horse's account, for it was steep and stony, the roads having been recently repaired. She had an idea that Lal might be waiting in the high-road to see her pass. Bernard, having her consent, hurried back; he was just in time to install Angela in a first-class carriage, with himself as guardian for their half-hour's journey. Then Angela, discovering that she was shut up alone with Bernard Fane, began to wish herself idiotic, dead, buried, anywhere out of the world, and plunged into a fresh discussion of temperance.

Lal had stood like a statue till Dolly was out of sight, and then tried to follow her. He had not seen which road she took, and his wanderings led him far from the station. At last he bethought him that the horse must be stabled somewhere, and began to inquire; and half an hour later tracked her down at the Railway Hotel. While he was still questioning the waiter, a man passed through the hall and would have gone out had not Lal interrupted himself and sprang forward, crying out, "Meryon!"

The gambler turned round, colouring with pleasure. "I didn't know you were home!" he said. "I heard you'd got no end of stars

and orders, but I didn't know you were home! I'm so awfully glad."

"I'm staying with the Mertons; what are you doing?"

"I'm here for the night. Come to my room, will you? There's heaps I want to know."

Lal, who had just heard that Dolly had departed full half an hour ago, abandoned his quest for the nonce, and went. Meryon and he had been friends for years, though the guardian angel knew it not; she would have feared the effect of pitch on Lal's innocence if she had. They met rarely; in the intervals their friendship hibernated, coming out unspoiled when times of refreshing arrived. Meryon wrote never, Lal rarely, and when he did his stiff little letters were mere catalogues of events. But friendship, like the python, can live for years unfed.

Meryon's room was full of untidy properties tidily arranged. A discreditable old Collard & Collard was its only luxury. He had been playing patience, and the cards were scattered about the table; Lal sat down on a bedroom chair, leaning his elbow on the wash-stand and his chin on his hand, and watched Meryon gather them up.

"You haven't given up playing, then?" he said.

"No, I never shall now—the cards have got their grip on me. You're looking sick, Lal," said the elder man, earnestly; "what's the matter?"

"I got hurt, you know."

"Oh yes, I heard about that in the papers. You came back in a regular blaze of glory; I was awfully proud of knowing you. Is your sister all right?"

"Angela? Perfectly — about to marry, I fancy."

"Is the man a good sort?"

"Oh, very. I think she will be happy."

"Been doing any more of your own work?"

"At intervals. When the chance comes."

Meryon jerked the bottom of the pack down on the table, and pressed and patted it straight between his palms. "Try a game of écarté?" he suggested.

Lal shook his head.

"I'll play without stakes, for once."

"No. I never play."

"I don't see why not. Even father used to play whist in the evenings, he and mother and two of the canons, awfully decent old chaps; and I used to stand behind mother and give her tips. Father was no end of a good player. I don't see why you won't, Lal. It's wonderful how it takes you out of yourself."

Lal shook his head again. "I never have played and never shall."

"Are you afraid?"

"Perhaps."

Meryon looked at him earnestly. "You're very queer, Lal," he said. "I believe you've got heaps of things in you that no one ever suspects. I believe you're a born gambler—I hope you won't mind my saying so. But there's no harm; you aren't like me, you'd never give way to it."

"If I once began I should never stop," Lal took him up, swiftly. "You're right; I'm not like you, Meryon. I haven't your pluck. I had to give up motoring because I could not keep my head while I was driving. I'm as weak as water."

"But you never do the things, you only want to and don't let yourself. I call that being strong, not weak. That's just what I like. You're so excitable, you have to keep tight hold of yourself for fear you should go to the bad, and yet you never do anything you shouldn't."

Lal only shrugged his shoulders. Meryon, who was still standing, dropped the cards and put his hand on Lal's arm. "What *is* the matter?" he said, tenderly. "What's worrying you, old fellow?"

Lal did not answer, because he was incapable of explaining. It was necessary for his interlocutor to drag the truth out of him by questions. Dolly had found out this; but whereas Lal's desire had been to escape from her, he was anxious to make confession to Meryon.

"I say, old fellow, is it a girl?" questioned the gambler.

"Yes."

"Then, of course, it's serious; it would be with you. Won't she have you?"

"I haven't asked her."

"Have you had a quarrel?"

"I have just met her, and she cut me dead. Heaven knows why; I don't."

Meryon, by a string of questions, contrived to elicit the story of Lal's courtship. The cause of Dolly's coldness puzzled him, as it had puzzled Lal, but after several abortive inquiries he hit at last on the right track.

"I don't see what could have happened while the meeting was going on to make her change so. What were you doing all the time?"

"Business."

"What, your own sort of business?"

Lal nodded.

"Whereabouts?"

"Oh, in the town."

"Tell me where, old fellow—that is, if you don't mind me meddling."

"At the Sailors' Arms; you know the place."

"It's a hell of a hole," said Meryon, soberly. "Did you go in?"

"For a few minutes."

"I say, it's on the way from the Corn Exchange to the station. I say, do you think she could have seen you?"

Lal was silent. Remembering that Dolly had noticed the place before, he thought it possible.

"It's all very well to say girls don't mind that sort of thing—like a man to sow his wild oats, and all that; but they do mind, the nicest of them. And she'd think you must be such an awful humbug, too. You know, old fellow, the thing for you to do is to go and ask her, and tell her right away."

"I could not possibly do it, and I would not for the world if I could," said Lal, with great decision.

"Why not?"

Lal shrugged his shoulders.

"I expect you mean you're too shy, and don't like talking about that sort of thing to a girl. Is that it?"

"I dare say."

"Old fellow, can't you get over that?"

"I *cannot*," said Lal, impatiently. "What,

tell Miss Fane that I — that the girl — Besides, she doesn't care a straw for me. I shall ask her if she'll have me, and then go. Angela, at least, will be heartily glad."

"Is her name Fane? Not Dolly Fane, by any chance?"

"Yes, it is. Do you know her?"

"I took her in to dinner once at the Mertons," said Meryon. After a pause he went on: "Do you know, Lal, there's two other men after her. De Saumarez, who I've told you about, is one, and Farquhar, the M.P."

"Of course she likes one of them," said Lal, after another pause. "I hope it isn't Farquhar. I dislike that fellow."

"I thought he was all that's virtuous. You never caught him out in any tricks, did you?"

"Not I! But I'd rather she married a gentleman."

"I always thought he was an awful swell," said Meryon, meekly.

Lal coloured and laughed, and glanced up through his eyelashes. "I am a conceited, dogmatic prig; how can you possibly tolerate me, Meryon?" he said. "I've talked about myself long enough; now let's hear what you've been doing."

They talked on for an hour or more, and

then Meryon persuaded Lal to play to him, listening the while in quiet, uncritical enjoyment, and caressing the black kitten asleep on his knee. Meryon always stipulated for a piano in his room when his resources could be stretched to cover such a luxury. He was very fond of strumming out airs from the overtures and selections which he heard from bands at casinos; he had an ear for melody, but had never learned music. Lal, on the contrary, was a practised pianist; he played correctly, an achievement rare in these days; his execution was sure and delicate, his touch very clear, bright, and firm. He was very careful to hide this talent of his in a napkin. Meryon had come to hear of it by accident. Lal sat down and very quietly played through first a sonata by Mozart, then a *courante* of Bach's. His taste was for the orderly, old-fashioned music; he hated Wagner, and thought even Mendelssohn too fond of innovations. Did not he say of himself that he was dogmatic? But he gave Meryon great pleasure.

Later, Lal went home; and Meryon, after seeing him off by one train, waited on the platform and himself followed by the next. From Monkswell station he walked to Fanes, but Dolly had not yet come in, nor had Bernard. Meryon would not wait; he strolled

up the Swanborough road in the hope of meeting her. Nor was he disappointed. A mile up the road he saw a girl leading a horse down the hill, and by her supple, slim young figure and the brightness of her hair he recognised Miss Fane. The steepness of Hungrygut Bottom plus the violent snortings of a steam-roller had again proved too much for the nerves of the chestnut; he bolted down the hill and almost kicked the cart to pieces before Dolly, who had jumped out, could catch and quell him. She left the dog-cart for repair at Dove Green, the next village, and led Vronsky home. Her dark cloth dress had a long skirt, which she held up gracefully, like a French girl, with curved wrist and prettily bent hand. She came on, looking straight before her; her lips were hard and her face was hard; no melting mood was hers. Irony, and a stiff-necked refusal to bend before the blast were Dolly's armour against trouble; she was bitterly humiliated, and would not cede an inch to humiliation. Certain constricting bands seemed to have closed round her heart; she had not spent so long a day since she was seven and waited outside her mother's room for the news of her death.

"Let me lead the horse, won't you?" said Meryon, turning to walk with her. Meryon

was polite by instinct, as Dolly was graceful.

"Thanks, no; he bites."

"I suppose you got smashed up. I hope you weren't hurt."

"Not in the least, thank you."

This was unpromising. Meryon despaired of introducing his subject tactfully; he was not, therefore, discouraged, but plunged straight into it.

"I've just been seeing Lal Laurenson," he said. "I beg your pardon, I hope you won't think it awful cheek of me to shove my oar in, but I can't help it. I've been friends with Laurenson ever since we were at Eton together. He's been so awfully good to me, I can't help speaking now. You cut him in Swanborough this afternoon."

"I did."

"What for?"

"I am not going to tell you. I mean," said Dolly, "I don't want to be rude, but I can't explain my reason. I had one."

"Was it because you saw him in at the Sailors' Arms?"

Dolly hesitated for a minute; then she answered: "Yes."

"I'm awfully glad—I thought that was it. I can explain why he was there."

"Wait," said Dolly. "Who told you this?"

"I got it out of Laurenson. I met him at the Railway Hotel, where he was asking for you."

"Does he know you have come to me?"

"Him? Rather not; I came right away without telling; he wouldn't have let me if he'd known. He said he'd never explain, himself, and he wouldn't; he can't bear talking about it."

"I can believe it."

"No, really you're quite wrong, you are indeed, Miss Fane. Laurenson isn't like that. He went there after a girl. She had run away from her home and he wanted her to go back. He goes in for that kind of thing. He and Miss Laurenson have got a Home in London which they run out of their own money, but it's Lal that has to do with working it; he's better than a parson, for he doesn't ever preach, he just lives. If he'd been anywhere in Europe that time I had to break my promise, I'd never have given way as I did and become the beast I am. He'd have seen me through. He respects you, and you simply can't help being what he thinks. He never told me about that Home, I just found it out. I've been over it with him. I never shall forget it."

"Do you know the name of the girl he saw at the Sailors' Arms?"

"Hilda Davis. She comes from here."

"I see. Thank you," said Dolly. "Yes; I am glad to know."

Meryon stopped. "I'm glad you don't think it was cheek of me. I'd better go back now; I'll just catch my train."

"Did you come here simply to tell me this?" said Dolly. "You're a good friend."

"There wasn't anything in it. I didn't think you'd snub me; and if you had I'd have been bound to tell you just the same. Laurenson's been no end good, being friends with an outsider like me," said Meryon, with simplicity.

Poor outsider! From a great way off his tired eyes had seen the bright circle of happiness; he came to the light, passed through it, and so out into the cold and lonely twilight, where his own lot was cast. He was made for the life of a home: sociable, contented, affectionate, fond of quiet pleasures, a lover of little children. But the tyrannous demon who had ruled him would grant no peace; Meryon was driven out into the wilderness, where he lived and where he died.

## XVI

### A NIGHT-PIECE

IT might have been supposed that Dolly would be anxious to make amends for her injustice. When Bernard came in, saying that Mrs. Merton had invited them both to dinner the next day but one, and that he had accepted her kindness, she should have been pleased; in place of which she declared that she could not go. She had no dress, she said. Bernard pointed out that she had dined with the Mertons before. "Oh yes," said Dolly; "but one can't wear the same thing twice over," and she stood upon her argument till Bernard calmly told her that he should go and she could stay. Dolly came near to a quarrel with him; she did actually provoke one with her father; and then she went to bed.

In the morning she awoke reasonable and sweeter-tempered, and begged her father's pardon in words, and Bernard's in deeds by making hot cakes for breakfast. Peace reigned over the house of Fanes, except in Dolly's

mind, which was still disturbed. For yesterday, in the flush of her indignation and reasonable anger, she had taken a step that she could not retrace. Waiting under the white sign-post at Dove Green for the smith's report on her shattered dog-cart, Dolly had made up her mind upon one point, and had clinched the matter at once in the post-office adjoining the smithy; and now the contemplation of the consequences filled her with lively discomfort. She calculated that these consequences could not arrive for two days, or possibly three; she had two days to prepare; but how she was to do so presented a problem of weight. Dolly felt that she had made a fool of herself, a sensation disagreeable to a girl so proud as she; of all troubles she could least stomach humiliation. Then, also, she knew that her blunder would bring distress on Lucian, and was heartily sorry, for she loved him dearly. But there was another, darker thought which would stay in her mind, despite of reason and despite of resolution. Dolly had felt the merciless power of Farquhar's strength; she feared his jealousy, cruel as the grave. Vainly she told herself that he was Lucian's friend; he was her lover, but that had not shielded her. Imagination offered lurid pictures of a battle to the death between the

rivals. Vague ideas of sending Bernard out to Petit-Fays as peace-maker crossed her mind, but the irrepressible voice of common-sense pointed out that her brother's attitude towards Noel Farquhar was not usually conciliatory; also that, even if she sent him at once, he could not possibly get there in time to do any good. In view of this last consideration, Dolly let the matter drop; but her mind was ill at ease.

Next evening when Bernard came down into the hall he found her waiting, muffled in a big white shawl. Bernard's hands and head were too fully occupied with his white kid gloves to allow him to draw deductions, and he discerned nothing until she walked out in front of him; then he said:

"Thought you weren't coming?"

"I've changed my mind."

Z-z-p, a button jumped off. "Oh, dash the thing!" said Bernard, disgusted.

"I'll do it," said Dolly, taking his wrist. "What a pity it is your hands are so large. Mine are at least small, though I've spoiled the skin with hard work. What did you talk about in the train yesterday?"

"That temperance rot, most of the time."

"You do waste your chances, Bernard."

"Well, she seemed to like it."

"Why didn't you ask her to marry you? You mean to, don't you?"

"All in good time; I'm in no such mighty hurry."

"I know *I* wouldn't take you," said Dolly, viciously linking the final button.

"I guess I shouldn't be such a fool as to ask you," responded her brother. "As it happens, I mean to get an answer out of her to-night."

Dolly was silent. His name was the first word that rose to her lips: his Christian name, the usual preface of an appeal.

"Bernard."

"Well?"

"Bernard, Angela Laurenson isn't like me. You ought to be careful; it's easy to hurt her feelings."

"I know all about that."

"*Do* you?"

"Yes," said Bernard. "I do. I'm not an idiot."

Trying to draw sentimental confessions from Bernard was like trying to pull a worm out of its hole by the tail. Dolly felt that he was slipping away, and put one last question.

"You do really care for her, Bernard?"

He deliberated for a minute; a most literal truthfulness informed all Bernard's assertions.

"Well, I wouldn't jump down into the lions after her glove, like that chap in what's-his-name," he said at last: "because I call that silly. But if it was a question of her or me—I guess I'd give my life for hers. I'm not quite a fool, Dolly; I can manage for myself. I say, do you think I ought to keep on these beastly gloves at dinner? If they have birds or things of that kind, they'll split down the back."

Bernard had not been quite open with his sister. At that very moment Miss Laurenson was sitting in her room with her face in her hands and an outspread letter before her. She had received it in the afternoon, and thus it ran:

"DEAR MISS LAURENSON,—You showed yesterday that you did not want me to speak, so I am not going to bother you with a tête-à-tête. I am writing this instead, to tell you that Fanes brings in about three-fifty a year net, and in the past five years I have saved over a thousand out of this, which invested in Guaranteed Egyptians at four per cent. brings it up to four hundred. I also expect the value of the property to go up. My age is twenty-eight, and I am in sound health. I have a fairly good temper. I have not done anything that I should be ashamed of you seeing, barring getting tipsy half a dozen times before I was twenty, and carting manure. I used to poach on Merton's land one time, but only when I thought he sold the game. I never have thought about any other girl but you. Will you, if you think you can

take me, just put some white roses in your dress to-night? If you wear red ones, I shall take it to mean No. I hope very much you won't wear red ones. I am sorry I can't send you any flowers, but our roses were all blighted this year, and anyway I know Merton has plenty in his garden.

"Ever yours with devotion,

"BERNARD DE BEAUFORT FANE."

Having laughed over this letter till she cried, Angela was now almost ready to cry in good earnest. After great searchings of heart she had come to admit that Bernard was all the world to her; but she would much have preferred to renounce the world and remain her maiden self. Angela was a little ascetic. Though she loved him truly, it cost her a bitter struggle to admit a man into her life; especially a man such as Bernard, who would gently brush away all her delicate scruples and cobwebs of privacy, and take possession of her, body and soul. She could trust him to be gentle, but would he understand? To Angela, wifehood seemed a strange and terrible thing. She feared it — she feared its prelude of betrothal: seeing herself more clearly than at other times, she confessed that hers was the nature for obeying, Bernard's for ruling. And how she should fare if her lover turned tyrant?

"I've brought your flowers," Lal said,

coming in with a cluster of white roses and ferns. They were prettily arranged, though a little stiff. But Angela looked doubtful.

"Don't you care for them? I thought they went well with your dress."

"I do like them; but—" Angela pushed over Bernard's letter and looked away. Lal smiled as he read it.

"Well, and aren't you going to wear them?"

"Shall I?"

"Are you in doubt?"

"Yes, rather."

"Why?"

"I'm afraid, Lal."

"Is it that you don't care—?"

Angela shook her head.

"Then you must wear them," Lal said. He came to her and fastened them. Angela looked down at the roses and up at his face; suddenly she threw her arms round his neck.

"I'm a humbug, Lal," she said. "You always ruled, not I."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. And he will. And I'm afraid."

Lal held her quietly. Presently he said: "I think you're mistaken, Angel."

"*Do* you?" Angela said, looking up with tears on her lashes. "Do you really, Lal?"

"I do. Fane isn't exactly an ogre, you

know." Lal smiled. "I shall be quite ready to give you away to him."

"And glad, too, I expect: ungrateful boy that you are!" Angela released herself, and began with unsteady fingers to pull out her crushed curls. "Wait till you're married yourself, and see how you like it!"

"I see no immediate prospect of that," said Lal. "And now, does it not occur to you that we might go down to dinner?"

Angela slipped her hand through his arm, and so they descended the stairs. They made a handsome couple, though Lal looked quieter and lazier even than was his wont. On the last step, Angela came to a pause of dismay; she coloured crimson, snatched her hand from Lal's arm, and fled into the drawing-room. Lal hesitated; he also changed colour; finally, he made a very formal little bow, and followed his sister without speaking. Dolly and Bernard had just been admitted to the hall.

"I guess that chap's gone cracked!" said Bernard, sotto voce. But Dolly held her peace.

There were present at the dinner only the house party, the Laurensons and Mrs. Prideaux, besides Dr. Maude, whose faint, acidulated cynicism, said Ella Merton, was like a sauce piquante. The voice of justice told Dolly that

she must let Lal know he was out of disgrace, but it did not say that she was bound to explain herself; and so, after smiling at him and taking his hand when they met in the drawing-room, she eschewed his society like the very plague. She set herself to behave nicely; she said little, and that little discreetly, and kept under the wing of her hostess. She was amused to see that Angela Laurenson was pursuing the same tactics, except that she had chosen Maud Prideaux for her house of defence.

Dolly went down with Norman Merton, and found herself placed at table between him and Lal. She gave Lal the view of a neck as white as milk, and a rich sweep of chestnut hair glossed with light like the roll of a stream at a weir; and she talked to her host all the evening. Merton was shrewd and pleasant, and had plenty to say. Twice Lal addressed her: to his first speech she gave a brief, cool answer over her shoulder; to the second she gave no answer at all. Lal did not repeat his words, nor did he again try to catch her attention. He turned quietly to his partner; he could afford to be patient because he was resolute.

Bernard also was content to be patient, but within reasonable limits, which he felt that Angela had overpassed; she wore his roses, but she had not given him a word that evening.

His partner at dinner was Maud Prideaux; and, following that simple strategy which goes by the name of cheek, he took her into his confidence and besought her help. Maud was already pledged to Angela, but that did not hinder her from deserting to Bernard's side. She was a born match-maker. As soon as the men came up after dinner she proposed a moonlight excursion to see the lake. Mrs. Merton sighed forth a rapturous assent, sent her husband for cloaks, and apostrophised the stars in an impromptu verse. A French window led out to a balcony, from which steps ran down to the garden. Mrs. Merton went first, to show the way; Angela, whose eyes were quite blind in the dusk, was a few steps behind. Maud Prideaux shot Bernard a mischievous glance of invitation, stooped down, and carefully tied up a bow which had not come undone. In an instant Angela found her chaperon's place usurped by a tall figure, which bent down and said, in a moving whisper:

"I guess you'd better take my arm or you'll tumble down the steps."

This time Angela did not refuse; she laid her fingers on his sleeve with a queer, wild thrill of feeling, half pleasure and half fear. Bernard put his own hand over hers. "I'm no end glad," he said, quite simply.

Then he led her, trusting to his guidance for every step, down a lonely, mossy path through a copse of trees: to Bernard's eyes the darkness was clear as daylight. When they were as far from the moonlit lake as the size of the garden would permit, he began to talk.

"I expect you're pretty shy of taking me, aren't you?" he said, gently.

"Rather. I—I should be—always—whoever it was."

"I suppose girls are made like that." Bernard paused to contemplate the strangeness of feminine nature. "But what I mean is that you feel it's specially risky taking me, because you and I are so different. Don't you?"

Angela said nothing.

"Dolly was trying to lecture me about that this evening," Bernard pursued. "She was saying you aren't like her. Well, I should think anybody could see that who wasn't an ass. Dolly could walk twenty miles and come up smiling, and I shouldn't let you do more than about two. And it's just the same with your feelings. You want looking after, and taking care of, and that sort of thing."

"I'm used to taking care of myself, and Lal, too," Angela pointed out.

"Well, of course, you won't do that any

more," Bernard assured her, with calm authority. "Laurenson 'll have to shift for himself, he's old enough; and I shall look after you. When we're married, you know, I sha'n't let you do the dairy work or any of the things Dolly does. We shall have to have another servant; but that won't matter so much, as you've got some money of your own."

"How do you know I have money of my own?"

"Mrs. Merton told Dolly you'd got eight hundred a year. Of course, one can't put much faith in what she says, but there's no smoke without a fire; so I guessed you had some. You have, haven't you?"

"Mrs. Merton never exaggerates. I have what she said I had."

"Have you really eight hundred a year? It 'll come in handy at Fanes."

"I hope you didn't ask me for my money," Angela said, with a forlorn laugh.

"I shouldn't be such a fool."

"Why not?"

"I'd rather be comfortable than rich, any day. I wouldn't saddle myself with a girl I didn't like, not if she had ten thousand a year. I can't stand rows. I suppose if it got too bad you could arrange a separation, but I'd sooner lose the money than have the bother of

that. A man should keep his private affairs out of people's mouths."

"I'm glad you don't think I shall make rows," said Angela. "But why did you want me, then?"

"Well, I don't know." Bernard paused and meditated. "It wasn't because of your money, nor yet because you were pretty; I know that. I only know, when I saw you that night, I felt like the chap in Tennyson. You know; he saw the girl at home in her oldest dress, looking no end shabby, and he just said to himself: *Here, by God's rood, is the one maid for me.* Well, I said the same; I made up my mind I'd have you, right away."

"Suppose I'd refused you?"

"I didn't think you would, in the long-run."

"Oh!"

"I don't mean exactly that," Bernard hastily added, feeling that he had not put the case quite prettily. "I mean that I had a kind of idea all along that you liked me, just as I liked you, directly we met."

Under the leaves and the soft summer stars they paced the path together. It was so dark that Angela bent her head to avoid an empty shadow, and walked straight into the brush of soft leaves which an elm-tree drooped

across the way. She stood still while Bernard freed her hair: expeditiously he did it, with no tender dallyings, and she was truly thankful. Angela was beginning to see what life would be to Bernard Fane's wife. Stable as the English soil beneath their feet, temperate as this English summer night, with no tropic storms and no yawning earthquakes, so would his love be; the cupboards in his house held no skeletons. All Angela's adventurous thoughts of freedom were coming home to shelter under a man's protecting care. It was true that Bernard had developed a talent for saying what should not be said; but that Angela resentfully ascribed to Dolly's interference. She saw herself darning her stalwart protector's socks by the fireside. The picture was touching and beautiful. Yet—

"I hope you'll like Fanes," Bernard said, tucking her hand comfortably under his arm. "It's all right now, but it's a bit lonely in winter."

"We might spend the winter in London."

"There's no one but me to see to things; I couldn't get away."

"Couldn't you have a manager?"

"Managers aren't to be trusted. If you want a thing well done, I guess you must do it yourself."

"But do you propose to stay at Fanes all the year round?"

"No. You'll want some sort of a holiday, of course. I dare say I could get away for a fortnight or so in January; things are pretty slack then."

Angela was silent for a space; then she said, with some firmness: "I'm afraid I shall have to be a good deal away, then; I must be in London sometimes to attend meetings and look after the different societies in which I am interested. I shall ask Mrs. Prideaux to put me up; that is pleasanter than going to a hotel."

"Do you mean, you go up without me?"

"As you can't get away, I suppose I must."

"I shouldn't like that at all."

"Why not?"

"It's jolly bad for husband and wife not to be together. A woman's place is with her husband. Besides, people are safe to talk, and that's a thing I can't stand. I guess I'll have to come up with you when you're obliged to go. I dare say you'll chuck a good many of the things after we're married; girls generally do."

"Can't you trust me in London alone?" Angela said, in a very quiet voice.

"No, I can't—" Bernard was beginning, in

all innocence, wishing to point out to Angela the perils of the London streets, where she had lived all her life, when she suddenly amazed him by withdrawing her hand very decidedly, and facing him in an unmistakably belligerent attitude.

"In that case, Mr. Fane," she said, her voice trembling with indignation, "I think we had better part at once."

"Why, Angela!"

"Don't call me that, please. There are your flowers." She cast the roses at his feet with a dramatic gesture. "Your idea of a wife seems to be a—a kind of carpet for you to walk on. You don't know why you wanted to marry me; I'm sure I don't know, either, since you say it was not for my money. You evidently don't think I'm good for anything useful, and you've told me that I'm not ornamental. I'm not fit to do any of the things Dolly does; I'm not to walk two miles without your permission; I'm not to be trusted to go about in London at all, and you even expect me to give up the work I've been doing for years, and *can* do! Thank you, Mr. Fane, the prospect is not sufficiently attractive. I must trouble you to look for a wife who is willing to fall in with your peculiar tastes. *I'm* not!"

She turned her back and swept away, leaving Bernard staring. He ran after her and caught her up.

"Look here, Angela—"

"Let me alone at once!"

"But you don't understand—"

"I understand quite enough. *You* don't understand how to behave."

"Angela, I do love you."

"I don't love you, and I don't want to!"

She broke away, and he let her go. For five minutes he stood quite still. Bernard had no lack of wits, and he now saw his mistakes quite plainly, the very mistakes against which Dolly had tried to warn him. It was the bitterest blow he had ever had in his life, and the minutes he spent there alone were primed with salutary reflections.

Angela, running out of the wood, came upon Maud Prideaux, who was enjoying a moonlight flirtation with Norman Merton.

"My dear child!"

"I—beg your pardon," said Angela, breathless and confused. Maud gave her a sharp look. She turned on her companion. "Mr. Merton, you can run away now and play; I'm going to talk to Angela. Mind, the bet stands."

"All right, Mrs. Prideaux," Merton answered,

laughing as he went away. Maud scanned Angela's discomposed countenance with a sparkling eye.

"What have you been doing?" she asked, in her usual drawl.

Angela did not reply.

"Dear, dear! Refusing Bernard Fane, upon my honour! Really, Angela, it's too bad to lead the poor man on as you did and then throw him over."

"I did *not* lead him on."

Maud shrugged her shoulders. "You're a shocking little flirt, my dear, but I really think you might have let the poor barbarian go. I shouldn't wonder if the gardener swept him up to-morrow, with his throat cut. There's poor Lal, too, ready to shoot himself. The way you young people behave is quite dreadful; I should have been ashamed to do so."

As Mrs. Prideaux before her marriage had been the most open and shameless flirt, Angela could not but resent this remark. "I *never* flirted with Mr. Fane," she said.

"How about his roses? I see you've given them back to him."

This was purely a guess, based on an observation of glances during dinner and the absence of the flowers from Angela's corsage. Miss Laurenson grew warmly red, and said nothing.

Maud's kindly inquisitive eyes searched her; she tapped her on the shoulder with her fan. "Come, tell me all about it. My dear child, what have you been doing? You're like Lot's wife, all tears."

"Thank you, I'm not salt yet," said Angela, whose eyes were still quite dry.

"Wasn't it Lot's wife? I don't pretend to be clever; it wasn't the fashion for girls to know anything in my day. What have you been saying to Bernard Fane?"

Sure of an interested listener, Angela told her tale. At its close she got a surprising shock. "Do you know what you ought to do now?" said Mrs. Prideaux.

"What?"

"Go right back and beg his pardon."

"Maud! I'd rather die!"

"Yes, and to-morrow you'll be dying—dying to go and do it, but it 'll be too late then. You're simply desperately in love with him, can't say his name without blushing—yes, there she goes, the colour of a poppy! The child says she's not in love with him! Well, well!"

"I hate him!" Angela declared, hiding her crimson cheeks in her hands.

"My dear child, hatred's the back door into love. Think of him, lying on the damp ground

with his throat cut!—such a nice throat, too! He's adorably handsome, for a barbarian. Of course, he drops an h or so now and then—"

"He never does."

"Doesn't he? Well, no doubt you know better than I do. I wouldn't have your conscience, Angela."

"He was very rude to me."

"Asked you to marry him, didn't he? Shockin' presumption!"

"I only told him the truth."

"When I refused a man, I always did it nicely and tried to spare his feelings. I don't see why you are so angry with the poor man; I'm sure it was very brave of him to fall in love with you."

Silence for a little while. Angela said at last: "Maud, do you really think I ought to beg his pardon?"

"Haven't the slightest doubt of it, my dear."

"It will look as though I wanted—"

"Exactly what you do want. You've been talking a great deal about the rights of women all your life; haven't you found out yet that a woman's best right is to obey her husband?"

"No, I haven't, and I don't think it is."

"Then it's time you learned that it is. We aren't made for anything else, my dear, you and I; we're ordinary women, and we must

make the best of it. You can't imitate Dolly Fane, so don't try to."

"It's the very last thing I should do!"

"Well, go and beg the barbarian's pardon, then; she would never do that." Maud had a grudge against Dolly because she disliked gossip.

"I *can't!*"

"Nonsense, my dear child! You're going to. There's your path; run along, like a good little girl, and be sure you don't tumble on your nose.—And there's half my bet won!"

Maud had sent her off with a maternal pat, and Angela found herself going obediently. Instinct led truer than reason. Down the shadowy path she came blindly hurrying, and ran full against Bernard, leaning motionless against a tree.

"Angela!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Angela said, with a sob.

Thus was peace established; but Angela soon found that in yielding she had stooped to conquer: her bear was transformed into a lamb. She might live at Timbuctoo, if it pleased her; she might wander through London alone till one in the morning, though plainly Bernard did not like the prospect.

"But, Bernard, why shouldn't I?" Angela cried.

"Because you're so awfully pretty," was the surprising answer.

"Bernard! I thought you said I wasn't pretty!"

"I don't know where you got that idea from."

"You said you didn't want me for my looks."

"Neither do I; I should want you just the same if you were like a gorilla."

"But *do* you think me pretty?"

"I should hope so!"

"As pretty as Dolly?"

"Dolly? Dolly's a milkmaid and you're a princess. Any one can see there's no comparison. Dolly's well enough, barring her carroty hair; but you're so awfully distinguished-looking. I don't see why you want me to tell you this; you must know it already."

"I like compliments—I expect compliments; that's one of the things you have to learn."

"It 'll come pretty easy. I shall only have to say out what I think."

"If you talk like that," said Angela, "perhaps I'll let you take me about London, after all. Now we must go back to the house; it's getting shamefully late."

"I don't want to go up yet."

"I do."

Bernard looked down at her and laughed.

"All right," he said; "I guess you mean to have your own way."

They came together slowly up the garden. The gold rectangle of the uncurtained window shone out in the dusk; the figures of Dolly and of Mrs. Merton appeared on the balcony, silhouetted against the light. Ella soon went in, but Dolly lingered, gazing at the dusky woods and the diamond gleam of the lake. Suddenly another figure came swiftly up the steps. Dolly turned at once towards the window; the lamplight fell on her face. Lal laid his hand on her arm and spoke in her ear: a single sentence, no more. Bernard saw his sister turn crimson. She answered briefly, broke away, went into the house. Lal fell back into the shadow.

"Did you see that?" whispered Angela.

"M'yes. I rather think I did."

"Oh, Bernard! What did she say?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"Let's go in directly," said Angela, in high excitement.

On the balcony they passed Lal; but Lal's face was never the index of his feelings, and it baffled curiosity. From the threshold Angela looked round for Dolly, to discover that, whatever had happened a minute ago, Dolly was not thinking of it now. She stood, one of

a group surrounding Norman Merton, who had the evening paper and was reading aloud from it. Pretty little Mrs. Merton was very grave, her eyes soft with pity and distress; Maud Prideaux looked horrified. Dolly's face Angela could not decipher; it was held by some thought more powerful than pity or horror.

"'. . . Had the explosion taken place five minutes earlier the carnage must have been frightful, and many families deprived of their breadwinners. As it is, we regret to announce the death of Mr. Lucian de Saumarez, the well-known author, who was a partner in the business, and of the manager, Mr. Smith Charlesworth. Both were standing too close to the scene of destruction to be able to escape. It is feared that the bodies, which are buried under a huge accumulation of débris, will never be recovered. Much sympathy is felt for Mr. Farquhar, who has been deprived at one blow of his friend and his fortune—'"

"Is Mr. Farquhar hurt?"

Dolly spoke out, careless who might hear.

"No, Miss Fane, Farquhar's perfectly safe."

"Not hurt! How did it happen?"

"No one knows at present, but they seem to think there was foul play."

White as death, she turned away, listening to no more. Lal, who had just come in, was

standing by the window; Dolly's eyes sought his. "Will you go out to Petit-Fays for me?" Angela heard her say. And: "I will go wherever you wish," Lal answered without hesitation.

## XVII

### THE ONE SHALL BE TAKEN

ON the day after the meeting at Swanborough, Noel Farquhar walked in upon Lucian in his room and found him sitting in his shirt and trousers trying to write. It was intensely hot, and he had cast off his coat and his waistcoat and his collar, his tie and his boots, had posted open the door and flung wide the window, and hung across a string of dripping towels to keep out the sun. Nevertheless, he was mopping his brow with a dirty old penwiper-handkerchief, and his face was colourless but for its tan.

"Sit down," he said; "sit down and let me swear at you for a bit; I'm tired of haranguing a condemned desk that doesn't respond. What's the matter, sonny? You look as blue as a thunder-cloud with cholera-morbus."

"Can you listen to business or can you not?"

"Ou ay, my trusty frien'; I've been chasing my plot for two solid hours, and it's clane disthracted I am. I've got 'chainless' twice

on one page, and so sure as I put down that blessed word I know I'll have to tear up the lot. There it goes!" He tore the sheets across and across and flung them at the paper-basket. "There was rather a sweet girl in it, too; I'll use her up some day for a three-thousander. You were saying—"

"Will you come round the works with me and Charlesworth?"

"What, again? I've done it once this day."

"I want to go round in the dinner-hour, while the men are out. There's something up, I'd swear it, and Charlesworth says the same."

"If it's anything exciting, I'm your man," said Lucian, completing his costume with a pair of carpet slippers and a white pith helmet, in which he looked as swarthy as a Hindoo. "Anyway, this is the last time. Come on, and I'll post my letter to her on the way."

He looked at Farquhar, gleefully anticipating a flash of jealousy, and he had his wish. He laughed, tossed up the letter and caught it, and smote Farquhar on the shoulder as they went down-stairs. "Only a fortnight more, sonny, and then we shall know!"

But Farquhar did not find an answer. Prudence and friendship combined to keep his wild-beast jealousy in order, but he never even tried to cast it out.

In the porch they found Charlesworth waiting impassive, drawn back into the shade. Summer had come suddenly upon them with a burning heat; the roads were padded with dust, herbs drooped as if they were broken, brick walls fumed like the outposts of Hades. Creeping up from the south, certain blue, hazy clouds, their scrolled rims tinged with amber and saffron, were surely invading the sky. In the quarry not a man was left; the intense heat, radiated and reflected from the granite walls, made the place a purgatory. Mica crystals scintillated in the grey dust. The noonday sun was shining straight down into the pit; the shrunken river, like a strip of blue satin, crept without coolness below along the cliffs; only under the great rock, which stood out now like a wen on the face of the hill, was any shadow to be found. Towards that shade Lucian promptly made his way, and there sat down on a wheelbarrow.

All the preliminaries were over, and the rock was ready to be blasted. On three sides it stood free, and across the fourth, at the back of the block, ranged the drilled holes following the line of fracture between the fine stone and the coarser. With what care Charlesworth had assigned and executed the boring and the tamping Lucian knew; yet the quarry-master

was now prepared to examine it all again, patiently testing what could be tested, rigorously fulfilling his duty according to the laws of a pride which forbade imperfections. Farquhar helped him; Lucian, who was really a superfluous person, sat on his barrow and gibed at both.

A steam-whistle called the men back to work at one o'clock. Hidden behind the rock, Lucian had a good view of them as they trooped in, and he was surprised by their behaviour. The Belgians are by nature friendly and polite; as many as knew Lucian (and nine-tenths of them did) had always for him a smile, a wave of the hat, a word of kind greeting; but Charlesworth was severely ignored. One youth went to the length of a long nose behind the manager's back. An English lad of his own age forthwith fell upon him, and after a brief and silent struggle proceeded to wipe the ground with his prostrate enemy until he craved for mercy; but the boy had merely expressed the feelings of his elders. Another point which perplexed Lucian was the silence of the men; a few were whispering together and glancing between their words at Charlesworth, but the usual lively chatter was not to be heard.

"Not much of the peace-on-earth business here, is there?" Charlesworth remarked to the

philosopher on the wheelbarrow. "I don't go around in these lanes after sundown without my revolver."

"Think they'd go as far as that?"

"Don't know; they hate me like poison, anyway. I can put up with that now we've got this business through; I guess we'll pretty soon see who's master here."

Lucian nodded. He was not so sure as Charlesworth that force is the best preventive of rebellion; in fact, he held the heretical idea that he could have managed the men better himself.

"You going to stay here till the thing's going to pop?"

"I mean to stay right here till Mr. Farquhar's lighted the fuse. There'll be time then to clear out; it'll take ten minutes before it explodes. I don't want any one meddling with these cartridges."

Lucian had no wish to face the sun before he was forced to; he waited with Charlesworth under the rock. Both were excited. Farquhar, standing beside the igniter thirty feet away, was noticeably nonchalant. The warning whistle sounded at five minutes to two; and, as so often before, the workers swarmed away to places of shelter, some to the summit of the pit, others into chambers cut in the

rock where no shock of explosion could reach them. Farquhar gave them five minutes' grace. A bell sounded; and the watchers saw him stoop and fire the fuse. Immediately Charlesworth uncrossed his legs and stepped towards the gate; and immediately after came a terrific detonation, a terrific eruption of rock, black smoke, and flame and fumes and flying crags; and then the collapse, as it were, of the firmament itself; and, lastly, darkness.

Those who saw it said that at the moment of explosion a huge ball of smoke puffed out and immediately came rolling over and over in black convolutions, rent by ghastly chasms and caverns of sulphurous gloom. They said that the fire flashed out starwise, radiating in a dozen spokes of gold from one common centre; and that the second detonation (for there were two) was more violent than the first. Farquhar saw nothing of this. He was hurled to the earth by the first shock and pinned down there under the fragments during the second; and when he found his senses and sat up he came near fainting again, for the pit was poisoned with fumes. He fell back, and, lying face downward, breathed in the less polluted lower air until the inrushing wind had time to sweeten that above. Then he

made another effort, and began to shake off the rocks which had fallen on him. He was horribly bruised; another man would have been disabled. But Farquhar was by nature insensitive to suffering, and, besides, his will scorned to submit to the weakness of his body; he refused to be fettered by pain. This man of many sins was not planning for his own safety; he was remembering only that Lucian had been standing under the rock destroyed, and he swore at the impediments that delayed him as though he could wither them up by the fire of his curses. He struggled free, and saw lying under him the fragments of the detonator, with a length of fuse attached. The appearance of the fuse surprised him, and he took it up. Crossed threads of orange worsted ran over it. By that mark he knew it for what it was: not the ordinary slow fuse which should have been used, but the other, instantaneous kind, where gunpowder is replaced by a quick match, which burns at the rate of thirty feet per second. Now the cause of the catastrophe was clear. Some one had substituted this for the proper fuse, and, to conceal the change, had picked out the distinctive orange threads. Only this piece, hidden in the body of the detonator, had escaped notice to show the manner of their treachery.

Farquhar dismissed the authors of the crime to perdition, along with their instrument. Now he was standing up and could see the ruin that had been wrought; the beautiful stone, destined for such fine purposes, was shattered, almost pulverized. It was not till afterwards, when the evidence came to be weighed, that he realised how this had come about; for the substitution of the quick fuse should have made a difference in the time of the explosion but not in its results. The truth was that only half the strands had been changed; the rest were left as slow fuse; so that instead of one there were two explosions, which, acting separately, broke the rock to pieces. But Farquhar cared little for his ruined enterprise. He looked round the smoking amphitheatre, he saw the faces of the men who had come with him from England, who were of one blood with those entombed; he lifted his arm, from which the sleeve had been wrenched together with part of the flesh, and called out to them in their native tongue:

"Men, there are two Englishmen buried under these rocks; it's our business to get them out."

The strange acoustic properties of the quarry carried his words to every man there. He put a point to them by himself lifting a pick, which

the explosion had cast at his feet, and beginning to work. In two minutes a dozen men were working at his side; in ten, every soul, native or foreign, was taking his part. To do the men justice, murder had not been in their thoughts; they had aimed only to spoil the rock. If the manager, who usually fired the mines, should happen to get hurt, it would be a lamentable incident; but the presence of Charlesworth and Lucian immediately under the rock they had not foreseen, and, indeed, had not known of till Farquhar spoke. Now they could only hope to atone by willing labour.

Through all that long hot summer afternoon they toiled and toiled and toiled. Men from the village of Petit-Fays volunteered to relieve those who were spent, and took their turn with the pick in rotation, but Farquhar refused to leave work. He tied a strip of linen round his wounded arm, which grew more painful when the muscles contracted; but he went on digging. He knew that his immense and disciplined strength had a special value. Mentally he could not rest and physically he would not, though the men began to look at one another as the hours passed in vain. Sunset found them still working; and the gracious coolness of night with its million stars. At last, at midnight, one of the English

workmen (the same whom Lucian had liked so much) came to Farquhar and said, very respectfully:

"Beg pardon, sir, but is it any use going on?"

"Use? I should hope so," said Farquhar, straightening his shoulders and pushing back his fair hair. "What do you mean?"

"Me and my mates would be willing to work on any time if there was any chance of getting either of them out alive—"

"D' you mean to say you think there's *no* chance?"

"We're afraid not, sir," said the first man; and a murmur of assent went up from the others, who had left work and clustered round. Farquhar's brows came together, and he stared at them as though he could not understand their speech.

"You say there's no chance? I say that's nonsense. I'd never have thought that Englishmen would shirk."

"We ain't shirking," said the spokesman, rather proudly. "I'd lay there isn't one of us as wouldn't be ready to work his hands off if there was any chanst at all; but there ain't, not a mite. I seen a good many blow-ups in my time, and I say there's no man could be living now after all that mess had fallen on him. If they wasn't killed outright they'd

have been stifled. Anybody as knows 'll say the same."

Again the murmured assent followed his words.

Farquhar still stood staring, but his face changed, cleared, hardened. Fever was running riot in his veins, and he was not wholly master of his words, else he would not have laid such a charge against them; for he knew it was not true. They had worked till they were spent; the pose of their figures as they waited showed it more plainly than words. And against that mass of granite all their toil seemed futile. Of what use to continue?

"You're quite right, and I beg your pardon, men. Knock off to-night, then; we'll take a fresh spell at it to-morrow, for I mean my friends to have Christian burial. I shall see that all you've done to-day is not forgotten."

As he had first begun work, so now he was first to leave off; he leaned his pick against a stone and turned homeward. In ten minutes the deserted quarry was left to the dews and the night.

# XVIII

## THE OTHER LEFT

FARQUHAR went home in a mood of black, resentful anger, which he aimed, since his creed disallowed a personal deity, at the callous rocks and the soulless forces of nature. He forgot grief as he had forgotten pain. He walked on, swinging his injured arm and cursing as he went; and in this temper he came to the hotel, and received the sympathy of a number of uninteresting people without betraying a vestige of his actual sentiments. They thought him magnanimous, heroic, oppressed with bitter grief; and with the good taste of their nation they left him alone with his sorrow.

In the salon place was laid for one, and the sight sickened Farquhar; it was like the turning of a screw in his breast. He paced the room for five minutes before he could bring himself even to sit down. There were two letters for him on his plate, blue on the thick white china. Bills they seemed, enclosed in thin

blue envelopes of the ordinary oblong business shape; he took them up idly and glanced at the address. One was for him and one for Lucian: both in Dolly Fane's handwriting.

Farquhar tore the envelope open and read:

"DEAR MR. FARQUHAR,—I have now made up my mind upon the question which you asked me. If you are still interested, and care to come and see me next time you are in England, I will tell you my decision.

"Sincerely yours,

"MIRABELLE FANE."

The ink was bluish instead of black; the postmark Dove Green instead of Monkswell; the paper unlike Dolly's stationery; but the handwriting was unmistakable. Farquhar crushed up the note in his strong fingers, as though to weld it into a solid mass. That she meant to reject him he could not doubt. He took up Lucian's letter; he saw with fierce joy that she had omitted to seal it. Now at last, then, had come the chance which he had coveted, the chance of reading one of her letters; and of them all he would most dearly have desired to read this, wherein without doubt she opened her heart to her lover. To intrude into that sanctuary was the prime wish of his heart.

He called to Laurette for a basin of hot water. If this last love-letter of his dead friend were found torn open, he thought it might seem strange; and he wished to keep up to the end the fiction of his frank and honourable nature. Laurette had been surprised by his request for hot water; the smile with which he thanked her sent her away wondering whether he had gone mad. Farquhar took care to lock her out before beginning his delightful task. The water was steaming hot. He held the flap of the envelope low down in the vapour, intending to loosen the gum; the thought that Lucian was dead and buried beyond interference under several tons of granite was sweeter than honey, though he would have liked to bestow immortality upon Lucian's spirit, that he might see this desecration and be powerless to protest. The paper turned grey and began to curl up from the edges; it detached itself from the underleaf with a small distinct sound. Farquhar drew out the enclosure and opened it with insolent triumph.

Long he sat there, motionless, the letter in his hand; but he did not read one word of it. After ten minutes he refolded it and replaced it and resealed the envelope and laid it down. He unlocked the door and called to Laurette: "I'm going back to the quarry."

"But, monsieur, wherefore?"

"To find Mr. de Saumarez. Whether he's alive or dead, I'll not rest till I have him. Tell your brothers, if you like; I shall work, whether I'm helped or no." He passed her by in the hall with a look so fierce and fell that the girl shrank out of his way.

One o'clock. The sweet plaintive tone of the church clock came down the valley from Vresse as Farquhar began to work. That mountain of granite, could he ever hope to remove it? He could not hope, but he could do it. He had gone through incredible exertions on that day, he was brought into pain by every stroke of the pick, he had neither hope to strengthen him, nor that excitement kin to delirium which had exalted him before to exalt him now; but the strength of his single will kept him unremittingly at the vain labour. And the force at the back of his will was the prime force of his life: devotion. All evil passions in his nature had in turn ranged themselves against that nobler quality, and been defeated. If a man ever was the slave of love, that was Noel Farquhar. He had purpose and lust and will to leave Lucian stifling under the granite, and to pry into his letter, and to marry Dolly in triumph over his grave; but that purpose and lust and will were

bound by one stronger than he, and Noel Farquhar was labouring under incalculable difficulties to get for his friend the joy which he coveted for himself.

Laurette's three brothers presently joined him, beginning to work in silence just over the spot where Farquhar judged that the victims were buried. The explosion had so greatly altered the configuration of the hill that certainty was not possible. Not one of the three had handled a pick before, and at first they damaged their own ankles more often than they removed any granite. There was a gruesome comicality in the scene; for Farquhar's silent fury of work seemed to hallow the place like a church so that they dared not speak, and the three young Belgians hopping about and suppressing curses would have made Lucian laugh in his grave could he have seen them. Towards dawn a blood-red oval moon rose above the pines and dropped a tremulous ladder of crimson across the stream; white mists spun ghost-dances over it. A cold change and a strange wind heralded the day's birth; the dawn itself quickened its white pulse in an empty sky. Virgin light came first, then warmth and colour, like the pink flutings of a shell, and the first timorous love-notes of the birds; and the three brothers looked at one an-

other, and thought of *déjeüner*, and wondered how long the Englishman would continue to work. They themselves did not pause; and presently the youngest found his pick striking against solid rock amid the shale. He tried to work round it, but could not find the edge. The others came to help him, and soon they guessed that they had come on a large block of granite, expelled from the cliff by the first explosion, but hidden under the splinters from the second. So massive was it that to split it up by hand and cart it away seemed an impossibly slow process; yet they dared not use the blasting-powder, for the sake of what might lie beneath. In this perplexity they leaned on their picks and looked to Farquhar for directions, Félix, the soft-handed *pâtissier*, surreptitiously wrapping his handkerchief round his blistered fingers. Farquhar's answer came briefly: "Dig round it."

They fell to work, and before long discovered that, though the superficies of the block was large, its depth was small; it was, as it were, a scale split off the face of the cliff. Consequently, they might hope to raise it by levers; and again they turned to Farquhar for permission to fetch them. But a sombre fire dwelt in his eyes, and his answer came sternly: "Dig deeper."

Wondering at first, then themselves infected by his deep excitement, they obeyed him; and suddenly little Gustave, with an involuntary "Sacré!" fell flat on his face. The point of his pick had gone through, under the slab, to some cavity beneath. As Félix stooped to examine it, Farquhar thrust him sans ceremony out of the way and himself knelt down to explore. He could not find bottom, and he sprang up again, his excitement flaming out as he called to them to widen the hole.

Now the toil went apace and the stones flew ringing aside. A gap appeared, and widened. Farquhar dropped on his knees and called, "Lucian! Lucian!" No answer. Up again and on with the work, and presently the gap was wide enough to admit a man's head. Farquhar tried to crawl through, failed, and set the youngest of the boys to try; but it could not be done. Farquhar's impatience would not wait till the stone was uncovered. He knelt again, and thrust his head and the upper part of his shoulders under the slab; then, resting his palms flat on the ground, he put all his colossal strength forth into the effort to raise it. It weighed — how much? Two tons, the eldest youth hazarded: a guess certainly exaggerated; for, as they watched, fascinated by the display of a power such as they

had never imagined, fearing each moment to see him fail and faint, as they gazed and listened they heard the creakings of rending rocks and saw the gap grinning wider and Farquhar slowly raising himself on his hands and his bent arms straightening out till they stood firm as columns upbearing the architrave of a temple — until Farquhar stopped, and paused to see if the slab would subside, and then rose to his feet, white as ashes, his face seamed with grim lines and streaming with sweat. "Get a light," he said. "I'm going in."

One of them had a box of the odious little sulphur-matches so common abroad, which kindle with difficulty and burn at first with a blue light and an inexpressible smell, but are not easily extinguished. Neither had a candle, and neither was in the mood to go and fetch one. Farquhar struck several matches at once, and so soon as they burned steadily stepped down into the darkness. They could see the flame illumining his hair and reddening the side of his face, but of the aspect of the vault, nothing. Then they went out, or, rather, he dropped them. Sick with excitement, they heard him saying, in commonplace tones:

"Lend a hand, will you? I can't get them up over the edge."

He had Lucian's body in his arms then, and, leaning downward into the dark, the three boys succeeded in dragging him into the air. Charlesworth's huge frame was extricated with more difficulty; after, came Farquhar himself, who needed no help. He left Charlesworth to live or die as fate decreed, and went straight to Lucian.

Neither was dead, though Lucian was near it; long after Charlesworth was able to speak and walk, and even help to revive his companion in suffocation, he still lay deeply unconscious. His frail life was so easily imperilled; and they had first been half poisoned by fumes and afterwards half stifled by their own breath. At the first explosion the slab had split off and fallen like a roof above them; the second blast piled rocks upon it and made it the roof of a tomb. All this Charlesworth narrated as he sat fanning Lucian's face, himself deathly white, with a jagged gash under his ear. Lucian looked like death itself, but still he breathed; and with the aid of copious douches of fresh water they brought him at last to consciousness. Farquhar straightway threw him over his shoulder and carried him to the hotel, leaving Charlesworth to follow as he might. Sad to say, the first use which Lucian made of his recovered speech was to murmur

feebly at intervals, "I'm drunk—I'm drunk—O take me home to ma!"

At the hotel they received something like an ovation; and before ten minutes had passed Laurette had told her aunt in the village, and the aunt her husband, and half the men in Vresse were hurrying out to give welcome. Nothing would content them but that Farquhar should make an oration; and when he came out on the balcony, a ghastly figure with his bloodless face and the blood-stained bandage stained afresh on his arm, they cheered him like a king. Never was any one in Vresse so popular as the unpopular English master; they adored him for purging them from the guilt of blood. Even Charlesworth came in for a share of the glorification, because he had not let himself be murdered; and when they had shouted themselves hoarse, and trampled down all the tobacco growing in Laurette's garden, and drunk six glasses apiece of Laurette's most innocent beer, they went home wildly enthusiastic and perfectly sober. Farquhar, having displayed his scars for their edification with his usual ironical smile, went to his room to wash and change before visiting Lucian. He conceived that for the present he would have no more trouble with his workmen. Then, at last, he took the two blue letters and went to Lucian's room.

The invalid was lying dressed upon the sofa; he had endured the doctor, had refused to go to bed, and was now ready to discuss his experience with gusto. He had already been doing so with Charlesworth, who got up from a chair by the sofa when Farquhar came in. The invalid at once patted the chair.

"Sit down, sit down," he said, hospitably. "Let's fight our battles all o'er again. I've been taking notes of everybody's sensations all round, and I'm going to write a realistic Christmas-number tale—'The Tragedy of Penywern Quarry; or, Little Willy Wears Poor Father's Pants.' How's that for a title, hey?"

Charlesworth, however, declined to criticise. "I've got to thank you for my life, sir," he said, looking Farquhar straight in the face, as he always did. "If we'd stayed in that hole till the shovel-and-pick department nosed us out to-day or to-morrow, I guess they'd have got empty shells for their pains. Now I've a use for my life, and so has my wife. I don't know whether gratitude's any use to you, sir, but you may count on mine."

"Oh, that's all right," said Farquhar, easily. But he met and returned Charlesworth's look with some degree of honesty; and when Farquhar was honest his eyes had the latent dangerous cruelty of one of the great cats,

panther or leopard or tiger, and they showed the force of a will keen as a knife-blade to cut through obstacles. Charlesworth recognised these two unpleasant qualities and did not flinch; perhaps he had guessed that Farquhar was too good to be true. His steadiness called out a glint of satisfaction; when they had shaken hands, each felt this encounter to be the foundation of a friendship. "You'll continue as manager?" Farquhar said, as the American was going; and, "While you want me, sir," came the proudly respectful reply.

Farquhar was left alone with Lucian; the reckoning hour had come.

Lucian was looking after Charlesworth with a lamentable air. "I like that man, but he don't care a red cent for me," he said, pathetically. "He makes me feel so awfully small that I'm only fit for a microscope. And yet I'm sure I've been splendidly heroic. I had a splitting headache, and I never once let on. Though, to be sure, he mightn't have known that. What are you looking so down in the mouth for, sonny?"

Farquhar flung the letter at him and turned on his heel; he stood staring out of the window, his hands thrust deep in his pockets and clenched there. He heard Lucian's "Hullo!" the tearing of the envelope, the withdrawal of the

folded sheet grating against the torn flap. Then Lucian sprang off the sofa and came and dropped a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm awfully glad, old man, and that's the truth," he said. "I knew you'd win."

Farquhar wheeled round. "What's that you say?"

"Congratulations: that's what I say."

"What the devil do you mean by such damnable nonsense as this?"

"Hasn't she written to you?"

"Yes, confound her! I tell you, I was thirsting to leave you to die there, and rot, till the worms had done with you. I'd have given my right hand to do it. I'd have given my eyes."

"Oho!" said Lucian. "You would, would you? Why didn't you, then?"

"Confound you! What do you mean by asking such a question as that? You know well enough. Well, then, take her, and enjoy yourself. Mind you, I've given you back to her. You owe every second of joy you get out of her to me. And don't you come playing the fool with your congratulations; I'd not swear but that some day I wouldn't pick you up and snap your miserable little backbone in two, as I very well could. You'll be feebler than your wife is, Lucian de Saumarez."

"Has she been writing to you?"

"Haven't I told you so?—curse her!"

"What does she say?"

"What does she say to you?"

They stood watching each other like stags preparing to fight. Then Lucian held out his letter. Farquhar held out his in return and took Lucian's with his other hand; the letters changed owners simultaneously. Farquhar devoured the open page in an instant:

"DEAR MR. DE SAUMAREZ,—I have now made up my mind upon the question which you asked me. If you are still interested, and care to come and see me next time you are in England, I will tell you my decision. Sincerely yours,

"MIRABELLE FANE."

"God! When's the next train?" said Farquhar.

# XIX

## ROMANCE BRINGS UP THE NINE-FIFTEEN

FOUR o'clock at Gedinne station, thirteen miles from Vresse. Rain was streaming down in torrents, yet of the two passengers waiting for the train only one was under the shelter; and when the other in momentary absence of mind came under the glass, the first vacated his seat and took refuge in the storm. There he stayed, keeping an immovable face while the wind lashed him and the grey lances of rain assailed him, staring steadily at the silver-and-golden line along the horizon under the storm-cloud, and the amber glow which was slowly transfusing the sombre brown swells of vapour. Mademoiselle Hélène-Marie-Denise Bonin-Watelot, the signal-man's eldest hope, with whom Farquhar had conscientiously made friends on his journeys to Brussels, came up and told him the number of the forks she had washed and the nature of the garters which she wore; but she got no *pralines* to-day from the big pocket in the overcoat.

When the train came in, the rivals got into different carriages as far apart as might be. Glad enough were they to be moving at all, though they stopped at every station. No lover journeying to his bride, nor widow hurrying to the sick-bed of her only son, ever found the giant steam more laggard. Five o'clock brought them to Houyet, where they changed trains and had their second encounter; for the platform was crowded, and Farquhar, springing into an empty seat at the moment before their start, found himself face to face with Lucian, and fled out again with an exclamation which the Belgian ladies, sitting stout and placid in an atmosphere of indescribable tobacco, luckily did not understand. Lucian, spite of his anxiety, nearly choked with laughter to see his friend hurrying into the company of three babies and a nurse, in preference to travelling up with him. Farquhar had a delightful journey; he stood all the way to Dinant and enjoyed a chorus of wails at every tunnel.

Six o'clock: Dinant sailed into sight and brought their third change. And now they had to wait for a full half-hour. The rain was done; the sunlight streamed over the earth like a tissue of gold, and across the blue sky floated low huge masses of dove-grey

cloud, clear-edged with pearl, and higher, motionless as though painted on the motionless dome, long plumes of immaculate white widened out to the wind. The indefatigable artist tried to describe the scene with a stump of lead-pencil on the back of Dolly's letter while he waited.

Travelling up through the lovely rocky valley of the Meuse, bright-hung with raindrops, Farquhar sat watch in hand counting the minutes; for their train was late, and there was a doubt whether it could catch the main-line connection at Namur, and if they failed in that they could not cross that night and must wait a whole day more ere hearing Dolly's decree. Seven found them passing Yvoir, the sky bare of clouds, and the wide Meuse rosing herself in the sunset's glow, which stained the very granite cliffs and dyed the green of young leaves madder-brown. Half-past seven: they were coming into Namur station, ten minutes late, and the Brussels express was due. Standing up, Farquhar held himself in readiness. Before the wheels were still he had sprung out, leaping with the train to balance his initial velocity, and was running along the platform towards the main line, for he knew his way. Lucian did not know his way, but he did not stay to ask it; he ran after Farquhar. There was a crowd, and two

stout Belgians, excitedly discussing the wonderful rescue at Vresse, got right in his way: as he reached the platform the train began to move, and Lucian, who was too much exhausted to do more than just clutch at the foot-board, would certainly have been left had not somebody opened the door of a first-class carriage and hauled him in by the collar and tail of his coat. Lucian collapsed, utterly spent, his face as white as paper; the stranger ministered to his needs with half a glass of brandy, and assisted him to a seat. There Lucian lay with his eyes shut for several minutes before he found energy even to feel curiosity concerning his saviour. To a person of Lucian's inquisitive temper, three minutes is an æon of time.

When his heart had moderated its suffocating pulsations and his eyes had ceased to swim, he made use of them, and discovered that his companion was a slight, fair-haired, good-looking young Englishman dressed in grey—who was watching him with a good deal of friendliness out of a pair of dark-grey eyes. Lucian smiled back and gave him a military salute, being still beyond speech.

"You were almost left behind," said the stranger. Lucian nodded. "I hope I didn't tear your coat."

Lucian put up his hand and found a long rent, but he smiled on. "No, it's all right, thanks. I'm no end obliged to you. I was dead set on catching this train; there'd have been Holy Moses to settle if I'd missed it."

"I'm glad."

"You crossing to-night?"

"Yes, I'm going back," said the stranger, taking a paper out of his bag. Lucian made a bet with himself as to what that paper would be, and transferred a sixpence from the right-hand pocket of his coat to the left when the *Spectator* came into view. The *Engineer Journal* followed. "Oho!" said Lucian to himself; "a soldier of the king, my friend, are you? That's why you look so smart." He went on aloud: "I've a kind of idea you saved my life, you know."

"By pulling you in? Surely not."

"No-o; not that way. By the kindly, felicitous, and opportunitatious administration of O. D. V."

"You ought not to run if you have trouble with your heart," said the stranger, unfolding the *Spectator* preparatory to beginning to read.

"Thirteen different sawboneses have told me that very same thing," Lucian confessed; "but it's one of those things no fellow can remember."

"I dare say it is difficult," the stranger assented, his eyes on the printed page.

In face of that august *Spectator*, Lucian had not the impudence to go on talking, though his own thoughts were far from pleasant company. He amused himself by studying the delicate and rather feminine profile and the long eyelashes of his vis-à-vis, trying from them to read his character and from his clothes his position and prospects; and the longer he looked the more certain he grew that both should be known to him.

> " Where have I seen your face before?
> It seems so familiar to me!"

whistled Lucian softly to himself, trying to fit together fragments of memory, as in one of those terrible improving Scripture puzzles which had haunted the Sundays of his childhood. Bright sunshine, an architrave of light-coloured wood framing an open door, and some bright figure standing beside him: his brain served up these scraps of information, but he could not complete the picture. His feverish mind had cooled. Lucian was not by nature excitable; it was the electrical influence of Farquhar's stormy temperament which threw him off his balance, and in his wildest movements he was never mastered by a single motive

and passion to the exclusion of every other, as happened to Farquhar. So now, anxiety respecting Dolly lay like a core of ice within his heart while the surface of his fertile brain was occupied in weaving a romantic secret history for the quiet young aristocrat of the *Spectator*. By the time they had reached Brussels he had made him a bigamist inclining to trigamy, and was only not sure whether he had poisoned his first wife or his mother.

Nine, ten, half-past. Darkness had fallen, spangled with stars, and the southwest wind came sweeping across the sky with a full and steady pressure which reminded Lucian of the strong blue tide of the Trades. Brussels sparkling in lights lay far behind, and Ghent was passed, and they tore through Bruges with three screeches, leaving a trail of opalescent smoke threaded with fire, and noisily rocking and stuffily smelling as a Belgian train alone can. Over the wide flat lands they raced, with a throbbing repeated in triplets as clear as the gait of a galloping horse. No tunnels were here; a grating rush and a roar told when they passed a canal and mirrored their square golden windows one after one in the glass of the water, so dark and so still. Lucian leaned out, received a peppering of grit from the engine, and got his first breath of the sea. There in the

west the sky glowed over Ostend. He relegated the aristocratic stranger to a prison dark and drear, with prospects of the gallows, and turned from his own fancies to face the facts of life. Years dropped away like dead leaves; he lived again through the hours when he gambled with Meryon while his wife lay dead above. In those hours he had come to know despair; and now, displacing the veils which resolute courage drew across the face of truth, he saw the same inexorable lineaments confronting him. He had met them now in every path of life. He was a failure: Dolly was not for him. He had known this, while refusing to believe; he did acknowledge it now, and reached the nadir of his troubles before the final sentence fell.

"We shall have a rough crossing," said the stranger, folding up his paper. "Are you a good sailor?"

"Tolerably vile; are you?"

"Couldn't be worse," said the stranger, laughing. "Do you go below?"

"No; I lie where I fall and abide in my misery until my journey's end. *Sic transit* is my motto; and sick it always is, too."

"You'll get wet through if you stay on deck to-night. Why don't you try a private cabin? They're comfortable."

"To tell the plain but honest truth," said Lucian, cheerfully leaning back and stretching a pair of muddy boots on the opposite seat, "because I'm clean cleaned out. I've nothing but my fare up from Dover."

"I see."

The stranger stood up to lift down his bag and put on his overcoat, in all of which actions he was as neat and quiet and dainty as a cat. After a short pause he turned to Lucian again and said, with some hesitation, "I shall have a deck cabin myself; will you share it?"

"I shall be awfully ill," said Lucian, very much amazed.

"So shall I."

"Well, under those circumstances you may be grateful and comforting; I'm disgusting. Sure you want me?"

"If I did not I should not have asked you," said the stranger concisely.

"It's really remarkably good of you."

"Then that's settled; thanks very much."

Thus it came to pass that Lucian and Lal crossed the Channel in one cabin, and very ill were they both, especially Lal, who suffered like a martyr, without one groan. He could hardly have done a thing more unselfish than this, but, unluckily, his conscience was too lofty-minded to applaud him for a sacrifice

merely of personal dignity. Virtue failed to reward itself here. Moreover, he was partly of opinion that he had made a fool of himself in making friends with a stranger. The hollow sound of Lucian's cough and the mournful display of dripping passengers at Dover were consolatory, inasmuch as they permitted him to father his impulsive behaviour on common humanity.

Of those dripping passengers Farquhar was the wettest and least pitiable. For the past four hours he had been leaning over the bows, watching the speed of the steamer, and formulating arguments that should be urgent enough to procure him a special at Dover. Those arguments only failed because the thing was impossible. Cursing high and cursing low, Farquhar went to look at a time-table, and found that the quickest way to reach Monkswell was by going straight past it in the express up to London, and coming down again by the slow. He went off to take his ticket, confident that though he and his rival might arrive at Monkswell together he would yet be the first to see Dolly at Fanes. How that could be was his secret.

But they did not arrive at Monkswell together. Lucian's unrecognised friend had a mind to follow Farquhar's plan, and he went

up by the express; Lucian bade him good-bye and remained at Dover. When crossing in the spring he had made the acquaintance of a porter; between the station and the pier they had become intimate friends. Lucian sought out this man now, and by dint of much persuasive eloquence seduced him into an alliance. There was no slow train up for some hours; but a goods train started immediately after the express. The porter and Lucian both talked to the driver of that engine from the time the boat came in till the goods train went off, and after its departure Lucian was no more to be seen at Dover Priory. It was strictly against the rules, no doubt, but rules are not unbreakable. The consequence was that Lucian was turned out at Faversham Junction at three in the morning, and there waited until a slow train up from the Kent coast-line carried him on to Monkswell.

First of the three, Lucian reached the station at ten minutes to seven, and set off to walk to Fanes, at two miles' distance. He was utterly tired; the exhaustion of the previous day's adventures, capped by a long journey, bad sea-sickness, a sleepless night, and exciting anxiety, weighed down each step he made. He had had nothing to eat, feeling disinclined at Dover and lacking the chance at Monkswell.

The familiar morning-scented country lanes spun round him as he went.

Nine minutes after the up, the down train from town came in, bringing Noel Farquhar and Lal Laurenson. Seeing each other for the first time on the platform, they saluted distantly. Lal passed straight out of the station from the down platform, whence a field path led past the station-master's pigsties and clothes-line to the road. Farquhar crossed over to the main buildings of the station, on the up platform, and there in the yard found his dog-cart waiting with an extremely sleepy groom. This was his trump card; he had telegraphed to Simpson from Gedinne before ever they started; by this he hoped to forestall Lucian at Fanes. And now all three had entered on the final stage of their journey.

Farquhar's dog-cart flew down the hill and under the railway arch, noiselessly running on its rubber tyres: past the surgery and through the village and on into the country lanes, long tunnels of green sprinkled with sunlight. The irreproachable Simpson still sat behind. They turned a sharp corner, and the horse shied across the road: Farquhar checked him mercilessly, glanced back to see the cause of offence, and pulled him up short. Lucian sat clasping his knees by the way-side.

He looked up; consciousness of defeat blent with laughing and charitable defiance was writ on his face; impotent anger and deadly impatience on Farquhar's. He tossed the reins to his groom with a curt, "Hold that," sprang down, and went to Lucian.

"Come, will you? Confound you!"

Lucian's face changed. "Going to give me a lift, sonny?"

"D' you suppose I can leave you here?"

"Right, then; I'm dead beat."

For the second time Farquhar picked him up and deposited him in the dog-cart; and they drove on together.

Half a mile beyond this the gates of Fanes confronted the road. As the horse slackened to ascend the hill, the groom jumped down to throw them open, but when he turned he saw that they were open already, and that his master's carriage was vanishing down the slope. He ran after it for a little way; then with great philosophy relapsed among the bushes and got out his pipe.

Farquhar drove noiselessly down the smooth yellow drive between snow-wreathed acacias, past the stream and past the lawn and past the rookery, till at the turn of the path where it widened to the sweep and the

house came in sight, he again pulled up with a jerk.

In the fresh morning sunshine before the open door stood Dolly, in her blue frock, calling the pigeons to be fed. They sailed down to her, blue, and fawn, and white as snow, settling around and upon her, and she scattered handfuls of grain which glittered like gold. Her milk-white skin, her chestnut hair, her cornflower dress were bright and pure in colour as the sunlight itself. One pigeon floated down with outspread quiet wings and alit on her bare head, and she laughed as she shook it off: a careless laugh, a free gesture, which brought the blood to Lucian's face. Then Farquhar's hand fell on his arm, and he saw what he had not seen before, what Dolly, with her back turned, still did not see: the figure of a young man in a grey suit in the act of leaning a bicycle against the wall, a bicycle which unkindly refused to stand. He settled it at last, came noiselessly behind, and slipped his arm round the curve of her waist.

Dolly turned to him; the watchers saw her colour blossom and the breaking of light over her beautiful, vivid young face, as her basket slid down the curve of her drooping arm and spilled her golden store.

"You!" she said. "Back already! I've

wished ten times an hour I'd never sent you, Lal."

Lucian shut his eyes. Farquhar, without a word, dragged the chestnut round and lashed him till he went flying back up the drive, scattering pebbles at every step.

# XX

## SO THEY TWO WENT ON

IN the break that followed, both turned and looked after the dog-cart. Dolly spoke first. "There!" she said, clasping her hands together; "now it's done!"

"They had no business to listen," Lal said. It was his embarrassment that spoke, but Dolly turned on him in a flash. "Lucian listen? Lucian would no more listen than you would. They could not help seeing." Again she pressed her hands together, and let them drop at her side with a gesture unconsciously tragic. "I wish it had not happened so, Lal!"

"I don't wonder you like him; he's very attractive."

"I'm so sorry for him!" She lifted her candid eyes. "Because I say little, never think I don't feel. Well, it can't be helped now." She turned the basket upside down over the pigeons crowding round her feet, and brushed the husks from her skirt. "Did you bring them back with you? Did you know

they were coming? Last night's paper said they were rescued, no more."

Lal gave her an evening journal, price three centimes, whose themes were murder and sudden death and the seventh commandment, all printed in vile black type upon villanous drab paper. "When I got to Namur I saw this. I thought it useless to go on," he said, while Dolly skimmed through a highly sensational narrative of Farquhar's heroism and Lucian's fortitude. "I actually travelled in the same carriage with De Saumarez, but I did not recognise him. Last time we met I think he had not shaved for several days," he finished, with a smile. Dolly let her paper drop against her skirt.

"I never should have sent you, Lal; I ought to have known better. I to think he had hurt Lucian! Oh, I have been a fool. A baby could not be more harmless than Noel Farquhar when he cares for any one; and he does care for Lucian. There, I've been in the wrong all through. I like him; I like both of them. This is a hateful affair. I wonder, I do wonder what they'll do."

"I should fancy that Farquhar will console himself within the year," said Lal, perversely. "I'm very sorry for De Saumarez."

"That is sheer prejudice. Lucian is far more

likely to get over it soon than Noel Farquhar. In fact, I don't believe he ever will get over it. Well!" She looked away at the golden sky, sighing, her brows drawn down. "I can't go to them myself, that's certain, nor can you. I must write and explain, I suppose."

"Dolly," Lal said, detaining her, "you have never told me which, after all, you meant to take when you summoned them in that fashion."

"I dare say you'll think me a fool," Dolly said, after a pause. "I hate vacillating people myself; but the truth is — I could *not* make up my mind. I could hardly bear to refuse Lucian; yet Noel Farquhar fascinated me, I don't deny it. His is such a strong character, and he did care for me. Then Lucian was penniless, while Mr. Farquhar was rich and in a good position; and I'm ambitious, Lal. Besides, Bernard was continually warning me against him. And I was so completely in love with you that I did not very much care what I did with myself. You *did* trouble me so," she broke off, her voice softening to a richer inflection. "You almost broke my heart. I was so proud of you for being what you are; and to find you in that place! I could have died for grief; I could have beaten out my eyes for seeing it."

"Oh, Dolly!" said Lal, and bent down

quickly to kiss her. The shy, swift, furtive movement brought tears to Dolly's eyes. There was reverence in his touch, there was even awe; and so, for the first time, Dolly tasted the grace of true humility.

"Well"—she picked up the thread of her confession with a sigh—"I suppose it has to be told. As I say, I could not see what to do; and I did not care myself; and Bernard would advise me till I was mazed with thinking. So I ended by leaving it to chance."

"And how did you settle it?"

"I said I would accept the one who reached me first."

"I reached you first, Dolly."

"And do you want more of me than you've got?" Dolly said, turning on him her face, full of sweetness and fire.

"What have I got? A bare 'Yes,' and nothing more!"

"Your own fault, for asking such a question in such a place. I longed to sink into the ground. Besides, I gave you the promise of my marriage vows; isn't that enough?"

"What marriage vows?"

"Love; honour; obedience."

"Love — honour," Lal repeated, strongly moved. "Do you give those to me, Dolly? You make me ashamed."

"You know I give them. I give everything."

"Even obedience? Dolly, will you ever obey anybody?"

"Certainly I shall," Dolly said, with proud humility. "I take my stand with other women; we all promise to obey, and I shall obey. I always keep my promises. There, dearest, let me go now and write. Afterwards—"

Noel Farquhar came into his library at The Lilacs and unlocked his writing-table, one of those elegant roll-top American contrivances full of drawers and pigeon-holes. He took out his blotter, his writing-paper, and his revolver. He made sure that this was properly loaded, and then dipped pen in ink and began to write.

"TO THE CORONER

"DEAR SIR,—"I wish it clearly to be understood that I write in sound physical health, and that my brain is not, and never has been, in danger of insanity. I purpose shortly to commit suicide by shooting myself, and I do not wish my body to receive rites in which I never have had a shadow of belief. In plain English, I, not being a Christian, do not desire Christian burial. I have neither hope nor wish for a joyful resurrection. This has been my lifelong creed. I have been at the pains to belie it, and live as the model of virtue, both in public and private, in order to earn the esteem of my respectable British fellow-

citizens. I challenge any man living to say I have not succeeded. Honesty is unquestionably the best policy for the man who wishes to thrive: *experto crede*. I would not wish to die with a lie on my lips; the taste of truth is pleasantly novel.

"Within the last few months the issue of a love-affair, together with certain pecuniary losses which endanger my political position, have contrived to make life uninteresting, and even burdensome. I see no chance of improvement, and have not the patience to undergo present discomfort in the vague hope of a problematical future gain. I take the only logical course. In shooting myself I carry out a purpose conditionally framed as soon as I was old enough to think for myself. Let me again repeat that I am not mad; and let me beg, let me beseech the twelve worthy gentlemen who shall sit upon my body to burden their consciences with no unnecessary perjury, but to cap the inquest with a truthful verdict of *felo de se*.

"In conclusion, I commend to my biographers the study of my birthplace, parentage, and nationality. I refer them for information to the records of the province of Kiew, South Russia.

"I am, sir, faithfully yours,

"Noel Dmitri Farquhar.

"The Lilacs, Monkswell, 2/7/03."

When he had finished, he read over the letter with satisfaction. While he was so doing, somebody opened the door and came noiselessly in. Farquhar glanced angrily over his shoulder; but, seeing only Lucian de Saumarez, he went

on with his reading, after taking the precaution of drawing his blotter across the revolver to hide it. With an indescribably guilty and shamefaced air, like a dog that has been caught stealing, Lucian went and lay down on the sofa. He was holding a handkerchief to his lips.

Farquhar closed the letter and took the revolver, glancing again at Lucian. Lucian heard the movement, turned his head, and for the moment took away the stained handkerchief.

"Farquhar, old man—" he began; he could not get any further.

Farquhar set his teeth on his underlip and swore. He sat immovable, looking dangerous, all rebellion; and then the inevitable law of his nature asserted itself, as it had done before, as in him it always would: the power that held him in bondage. He tore the letter across and across and across again and flung the fragments into the grate; he took up the revolver by the barrel and hurled it through the window across the flower-beds into the fountain on the lawn. He came and knelt by Lucian's side, and lifted him with fierce tenderness against his breast.

"Confound you! What have you been doing to yourself?" he said.

THE END

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